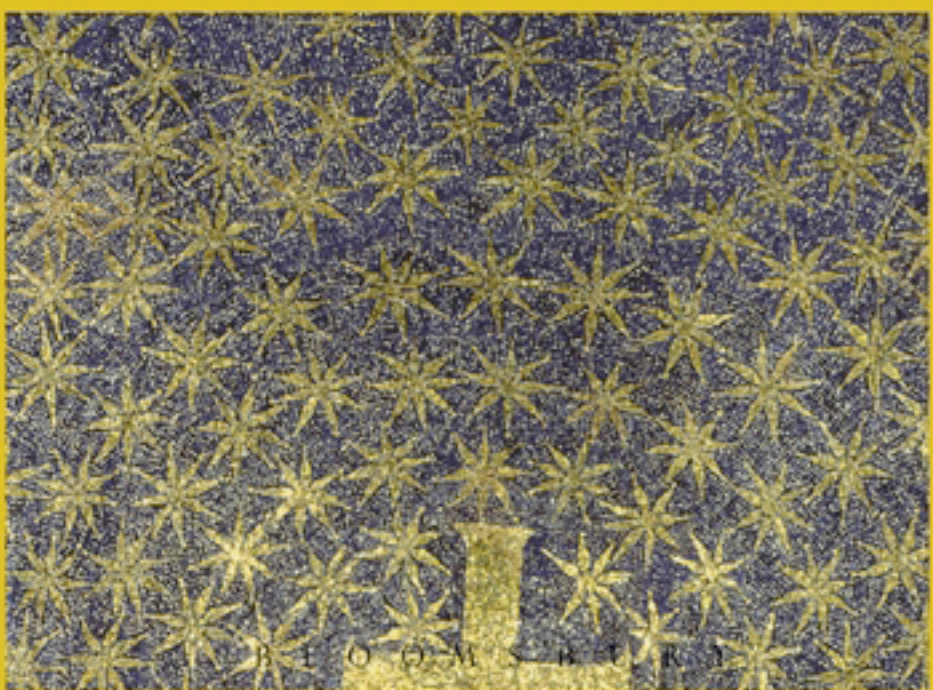
Daniele Iozzia

AESTHETIC THEMES IN PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN NEOPLATONISM

FROM PLOTINUS TO GREGORY OF NYSSA



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From Plotinus to Gregory of Nyssa

Daniele Iozzia

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First published 2015
Paperback edition first published 2016

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-47257-232-5
PB: 978-1-35000-793-2
ePDF: 978-1-47257-234-9
ePub: 978-1-47257-233-2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Iozzia, Daniele.
Aesthetic themes in pagan and Christian Neoplatonism : from Plotinus to Gregory of Nyssa / Daniele Iozzia.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-4725-7232-5 (hardback)
1. Philosophy, Ancient. 2. Neoplatonism. 3. Aesthetics. 4. Plotinus. 5. Gregory, of Nyssa, Saint, approximately 335-approximately 394. I. Title.
B631.I59 2015
111'.8509—dc23
2014046611

Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk
Printed and bound in Great Britain

To Alberta, Antonio, Viola and Silvio.

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Foreword

The interpretation and reconstruction of the aesthetic thought of antiquity poses interesting questions and at the same time presents a number of difficulties. Mainly, the reflections on the beautiful and art, which are the chief subjects of what we identify as aesthetics, are always inserted by the ancient thinkers in contexts that are related to other issues, such as the ethical-political or the ontological and metaphysical. If we consider specifically late antiquity, the attempt to reconstruct a coherent picture of aesthetic thinking is made even more complex by the difficulty of reading the culture and philosophy of the time in a comprehensive manner. Despite the increasingly large number of studies on this period, and the general attention to it, many key elements about the relationship between philosophy and material culture still elude us.

This volume is presented as a thorough study of the cultural variations of the period, carried out with philological attention to the original texts and at the same time with a deep knowledge of the wider cultural and artistic contexts. This is not an easy task in itself, since the need to read and understand a considerable number of texts of various kinds, primarily philosophical but also of ancient Christian literature, archaeology, art history and cultural history, requires the scholar to be conversant with different disciplines, which is not common. Daniele Iozzia, who completed his education in Catania, a leading centre for the studies on ancient and Christian Neoplatonism, proves to have precisely these skills, as he initially studied classics, and integrated this training with philosophical studies alongside a personal interest in artistic activity. The fusion of these diverse elements makes the aesthetic research congenial to him.

Iozzia's study has the advantage of incorporating all the above aspects, presenting them in a coherent way and giving a convincing interpretation of the aesthetics of late antiquity in its development within Neoplatonism. Particularly fine is the choice of subjects on which the author has focused, starting from the relationship between the philosophical and rhetorical

tradition and its elaboration in Christian culture. The rhetorical expression of the philosophical content through the use of metaphor is considered in the context of the influence that Plotinus' writings had on the Cappadocian Fathers. Sculpture and painting are regarded through two different perspectives, one of which is metaphorical and paraenetic, the other didactic and anagogic, both with their lasting cultural heritage. In his survey of the theoretical reasons of the taste for gold and light effects in late antiquity, the specific influence of Plotinus on Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa is revealed. Finally, the paradoxes of language are methodically examined in their use in expressing divine beauty.

The premise for this analysis is the continuity, in late antiquity, between pagan philosophy and Christian thought. They both shaped, certainly in different ways and often complementing each other, the structures of thinking of a society on the border between two worlds, the ancient and the medieval. Late antiquity can be understood only if we are aware of its specific characteristics yet at the same time of the elements of continuity with what preceded it and the legacy it left afterwards. The choice to focus on Plotinus and Gregory of Nyssa offers a chronologically and thematically focused approach, and at the same time sheds light on an important series of common elements which affected the civilization of the time in its entirety.

A special merit of the volume is that it includes references to late antique art, even if considered only as examples. The author, convincingly, identifies the philosophical elements that found a counterpart in the work of artists and in the taste of the period and that, as in the case of the use of gold, continued to be dominant for a very long time. The research in this book, therefore, gives a coherent and original picture of the aesthetic reflection of the third and fourth centuries, and the structure of this volume, which combines conceptions about art and on the nature of divine beauty, leads to the discovery of unexplored aspects of the thought of an age.

Maria Di Pasquale Barbanti

Preface

In the last six years my research has been focusing on aesthetic issues in late antiquity and their influence on medieval and Renaissance art. In particular, a seminar I hosted in Catania in 2012 (whose proceedings have been published in Daniele Iozzia (ed.), *Philosophy and art in Late Antiquity. Proceedings of the International Seminar of Catania, 8–9 November 2012*, Acireale: Bonanno, 2013) has given to me the opportunity to re-think some aspects of the late antique reflection and to discuss them with other international scholars.

During my PhD I studied the thought of Gregory of Nyssa in its connection to Neoplatonism. The results of my PhD thesis have been published in *Filosofia emendata. Elementi connessi col Neoplatonismo nell'esegesi esamerale di Gregorio di Nissa*, Acireale-Roma: Bonanno 2006. Since then I have turned my attention to Plotinus and his aesthetic reflection but always maintaining an interest in the Christian Fathers, with the belief that in order to understand a specific age it is necessary to study all its different aspects and currents. This is particularly necessary in the case of late antiquity, when many of the ideas that informed the later medieval and Renaissance culture were first conceived.

Being an artist myself, as well as a scholar, I am particularly fascinated by the subjective point of view of the makers of images and by the technical aspects of the material production, which the philosophers interpreted and readapted in their descriptions and metaphors.

I wish to thank Maria Di Pasquale Barbanti for writing the foreword to this volume but above all for her costant help and advice over the last fifteen years. I would also like to thank Professor Giancarlo Magnano San Lio, Head of the Department of Humanities of the University of Catania, for support in my research and in publishing this book, and all my colleagues in Catania for many useful conversations. My thanks to Professor Anne Sheppard for her generous and extremely valuable suggestions, to Anna MacDiarmid and Alice Reid of Bloomsbury for their excellent assistance and to the anonymous referees to my publication proposal, who have helped me a great deal with

their comments. I finally wish to thank all my family and especially Caron, whose loving patience and care have allowed me to finish this book.

I am, of course, solely responsible for any errors, omissions and inconsistencies in this volume.

Daniele Iozzia, July 2014

Introduction
The Heritage of Classicism in Late Antiquity

The issue of the portrait

The characteristics of the imperial portraits of the third century AD are helpful in understanding the evolution from ancient to Byzantine and medieval art. The portraits of Gordian III and Gallienus, for example, show a tendency towards abstraction, with some elements of the face, such as eyes, eyebrows and the definition of the mouth becoming dominant over others, and the head showing a strongly geometrical shape.[1]

Among the different types of portraits of Gallienus, one stands out (see Figure I.1), in which the emperor is depicted with longer and fuller hair than the previous ones, in an allusion to the iconography of Alexander the Great,[2] consistent with what has been described as the Gallienic Renaissance. In the age of Gallienus, the revival of the classical style of the fifth and fourth centuries BC is not confined to visual arts but can also be linked to the desire to refer to classical antiquity clearly visible in philosophers such as Plotinus, who presents himself as a close follower and heir to Plato in Rome, as opposed to the Platonic school in Athens.[3]

In view of this, would it be correct to define Plotinus as a classicist? This question might seem irrelevant, since the revision of the common view on Neoplatonism has highlighted all its elements of rupture and innovation in relation to the earlier tradition.[4] Moreover, the most distinctive passages from Plotinus' writings show a new and anticlassical dimension, so radical that it is not easy to recognize at first a real descent from the philosophy of the fourth century BC. Plotinus, however, believed himself to be a true Platonist, and classical culture, if not its system of values, played an eminent part in his world. In particular, he adopted the Greek myths as a common element in many of his metaphors, following Plato's example. Therefore, at least from this point of

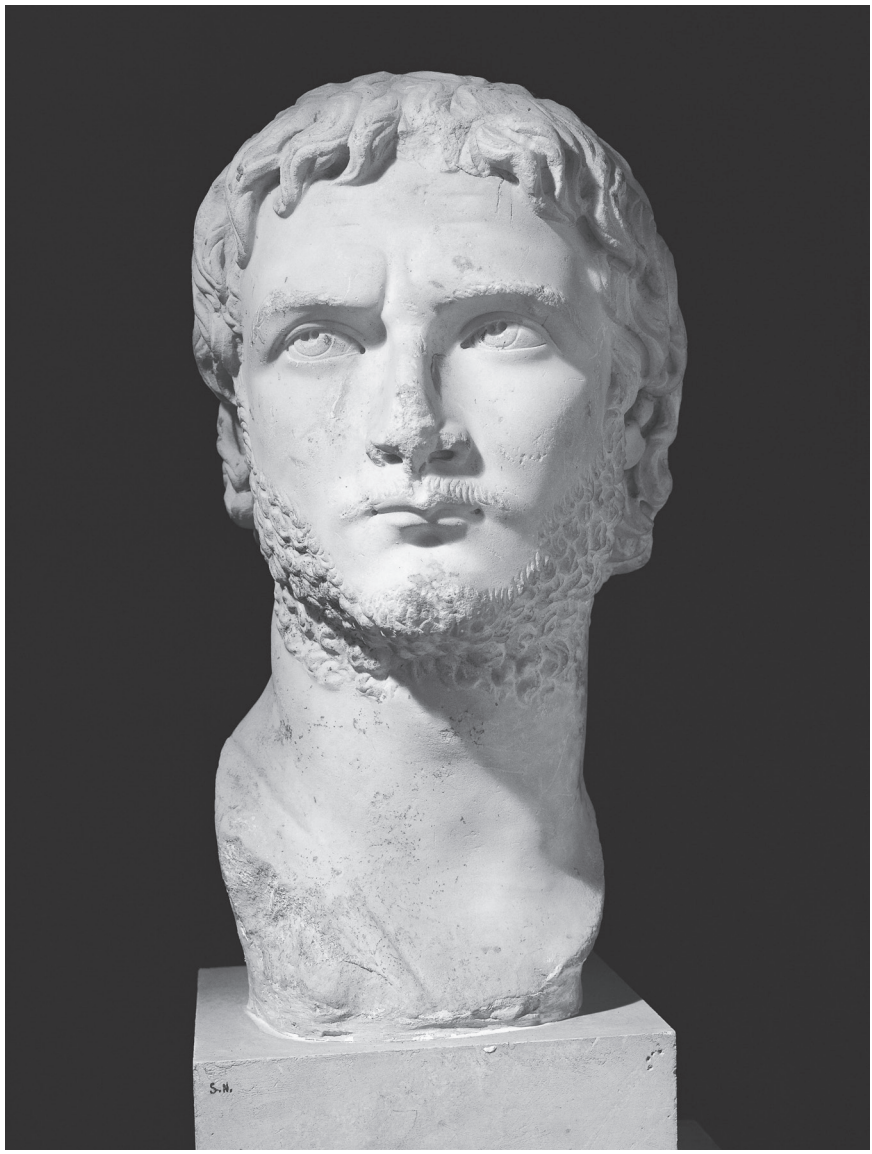

Figure I.1 Portrait of the Emperor Gallienus, third century AD. Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome (© De Agostini Picture Library / A. Dagli Orti / Bridgeman Images).

view, Plotinus could be considered as an exponent of the classical revival during the reign of Gallienus, either because his philosophy was part of a precise plan on the part of the emperor himself and his circle,[5] or because it reflected a wider current accepted and encouraged by the imperial court.

The project of founding a city of philosophers, Platonopolis, supported by Gallienus' wife Salonina, can well be referred to this classical revival.

Like the art of the period, however, the philosophy of Plotinus turns to the past in a very idiosyncratic way. The imperial portraits, although inspired by the classical tradition, convey many of the spiritual needs of the time, which sometimes collide to an extreme with their ancient Greek models. A telling example of this clash is a very fine bust (see Figure I.2), now in the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, but once belonging to the English antiquarian John Lyde Browne, who sold most of his collection to Catherine II. Probably a portrait of the Empress Salonina, it shows the body solemnly draped in an alluring manner, in open reference to the fifth-century BC style and to its revivals under Augustus and Hadrian. The sitter seems to be assimilated to Venus,[6] a common device in the imperial portraits of the period, but the sensuality of the chest and the shoulders contrasts sharply with the doleful expression of the face and the accentuated wrinkles of the neck. The bust as a whole visually conveys a surprising interpretation of Classicism, where the struggles and anxieties[7] of the soul are superimposed on the serene forms of the tradition. The same could be said of the Platonic inspiration (integrated with some Pythagorean, Aristotelian and Stoic elements) of Plotinus' thought, which was adapted to a system reflecting a specific age.

The relationship of Plotinus with the imperial court and his influence on the spiritual and aesthetic currents of the time have been the subject of debate, but the exact connection between the philosopher and the imperial family is not completely clear. It seems implausible that Plotinus was a conscious trend-setter and it is therefore necessary to be cautious in linking the philosopher's doctrines to the stylistic trends of the time. At the same time, however, it will be useful to disclose at a later point some revealing connections between his thought and late antique art.

The fact that Porphyry starts the biography of Plotinus with the episode of his refusal to be portrayed has been considered significant for understanding his attitude towards both art and the image of self.[8] Plotinus resists the idea of sitting for a portrait,[9] arguing that it would be foolish and intrinsically pointless: οὐ γὰρ ἀρκεῖ φέρειν ὃ ἡ φύσις εἴδωλον ἡμῖν περιτέθεικεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰδώλου εἴδωλον συγχωρεῖν αὐτὸν ἀξιοῦν πολυχρονιώτερον καταλιπεῖν ὡς δή τι τῶν ἀξιοθεάτων ἔργων; 'Why really, is it not enough to have to

Figure I.2 Portrait of the Empress Salonina, third century AD. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg (© The State Hermitage Museum, photo by Vladimir Terebenin).

carry the image in which nature has encased us, without you requesting me to agree to leave behind me a longer-lasting image of the image, as if it was something genuinely worth looking at?'[10] In a distinctively Platonic manner, the work of art is considered a copy of a sensible being which is itself a mere imitation and physical reflection of a spiritual reality. For this reason Plotinus refuses to sit for a work which would prove scarcely useful for the spiritual progress of his disciples. However, they did not entirely follow the master's Platonic integrity, and commissoned the artist Carterius to make a portrait of the philosopher from memory without his knowledge, with the additional guidance and suggestions of Amelius, the disciple who devised the stratagem. It was Carterius' talent, says Porphyry, which provided a good likeness.

A group of busts from the Gallienic era have been recognized as effigies of Plotinus,[11] perhaps based on Carterius' portrait. One in particular stands out (see Figure I.3) as an example of the art of Gallienus' time. It is finely carved and has noticeably non-European features in the nose and the mouth.

The painted portraits of the period are notoriously striking, especially those discovered in the area of El Fayum (see Figure I.4). Although it is not clear if they had only a funerary function, they were certainly painted from life. This type of art is extremely evocative and even moving to the modern eye, but might have irritated the Platonists for its unapologetic realism, as can be seen in the portrait of a youth with a surgical cut in one eye (see Figure I.5). What is recorded here is not simply the image in which 'nature has encased' the sitter, but also, in a frank way, the least pleasant accidents of his disease.[12]

The episode of a spiritual man's refusal to be portrayed, and of the subsequent devices planned by his friends or disciples to do this, is not isolated and can be found elsewhere in late antiquity, specifically in Christian texts. In the *Acta Johannis*, Chs 26–29, probably written in the second century, a portrait of the apostole is furtively painted. When John discovers his disciple worshipping the painting, he dismisses it as fleshy, 'a dead image of a dead man', because the material representation cannot reproduce the immortal soul. Jean Pépin noted[13] the analogy between Plotinus' reply to Amelius and the response that Paulinus of Nola[14] gave to a similar request. According to the bishop, it was not worth leaving a record of the temporal man, *terreni hominis*, while the celestial one cannot be portrayed.

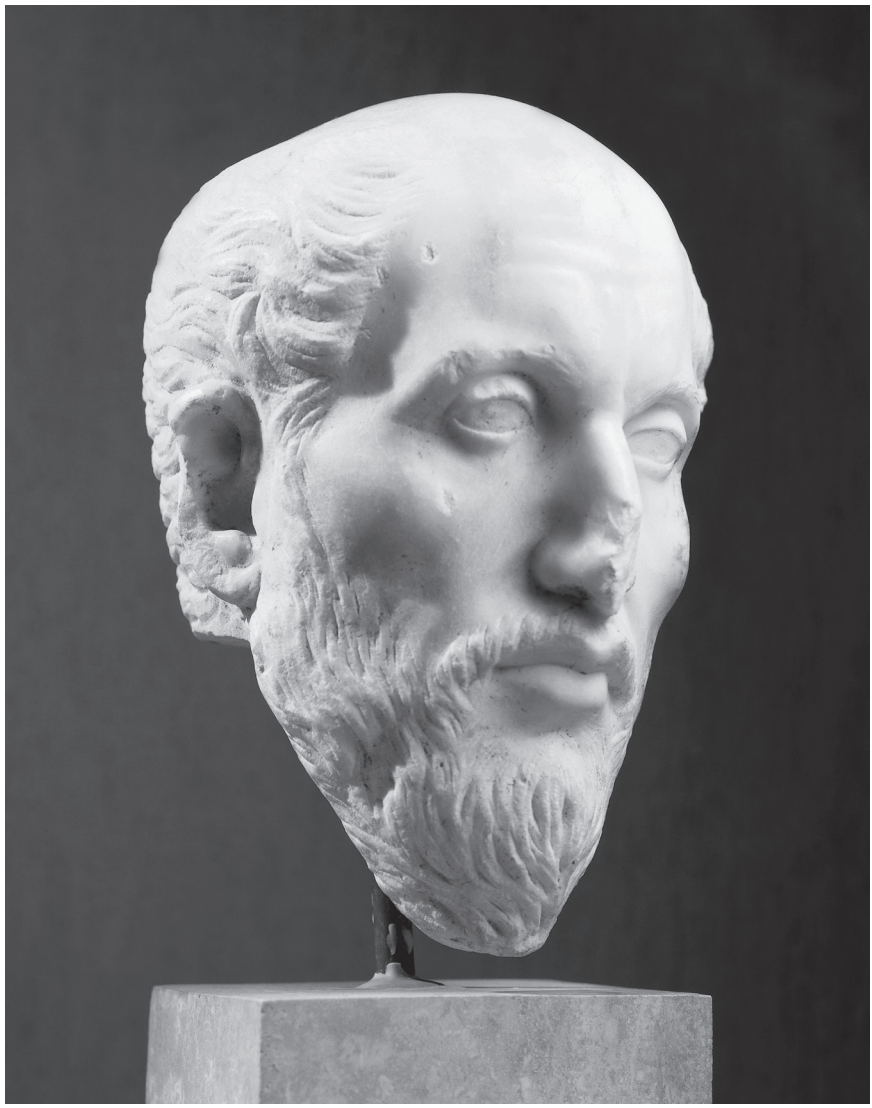

Figure I.3 Portrait of Plotinus (?), third or fourth century AD. Museo Ostiense, Ostia (© De Agostini Picture Library / G. Dagli Orti / Bridgeman Images).

A similar attitude can be also found at the beginning of the seventh century in the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*,[15] where the monk, whose life was particularly adventurous, rebukes those who suggest he be portrayed, saying that such a desire is futile and completely in contrast to spiritual life. A portrait was made, however, because a painter was introduced surreptitiously

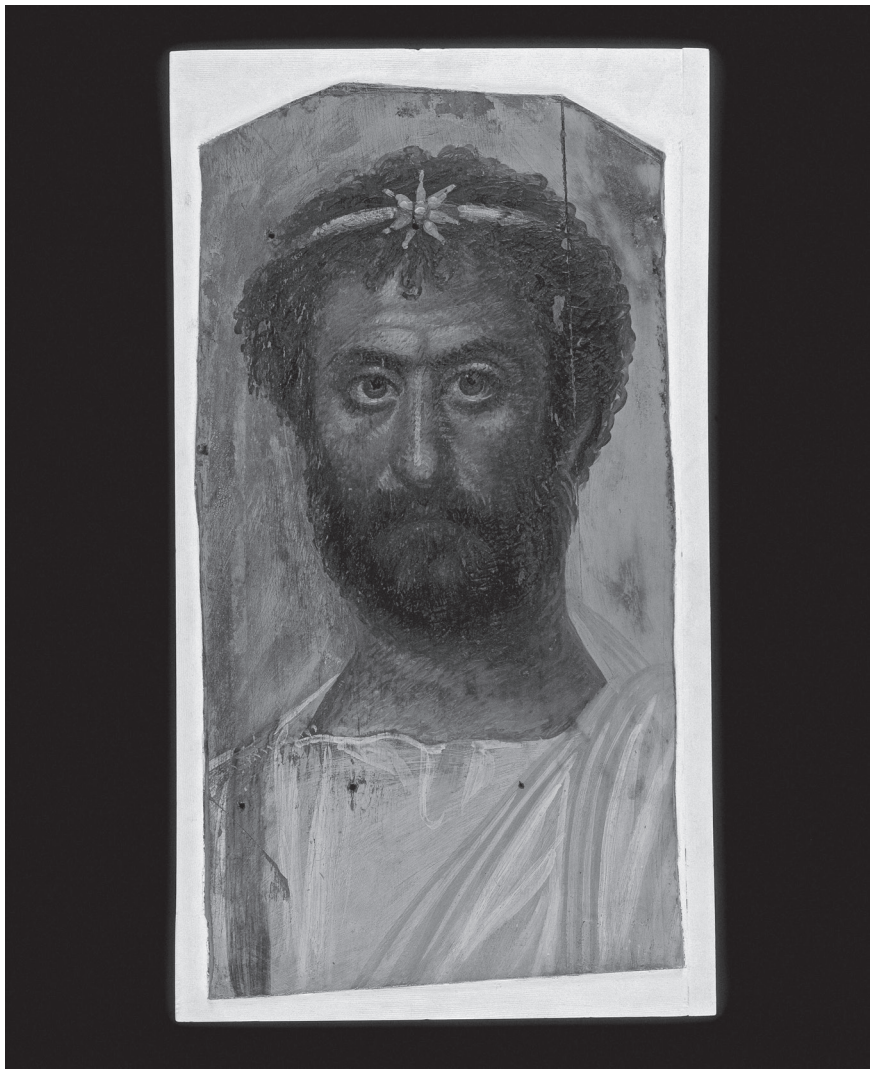

Figure I.4 Portrait of a bearded man wearing a fillet with a gold star, probably second half of the second century AD. British Museum, London (© Trustees of the British Museum).

to the presence of the saint, so that he could record the monk's features and reproduce them later.[16] Ironically, the extraordinary prophetic qualities shown by Theodore on numerous occasions were not effective in the case of this benevolent deception.

Putting aside any discussion of the historical authenticity of these episodes, they show that the refusal to be portrayed is a specific *topos* developed in late

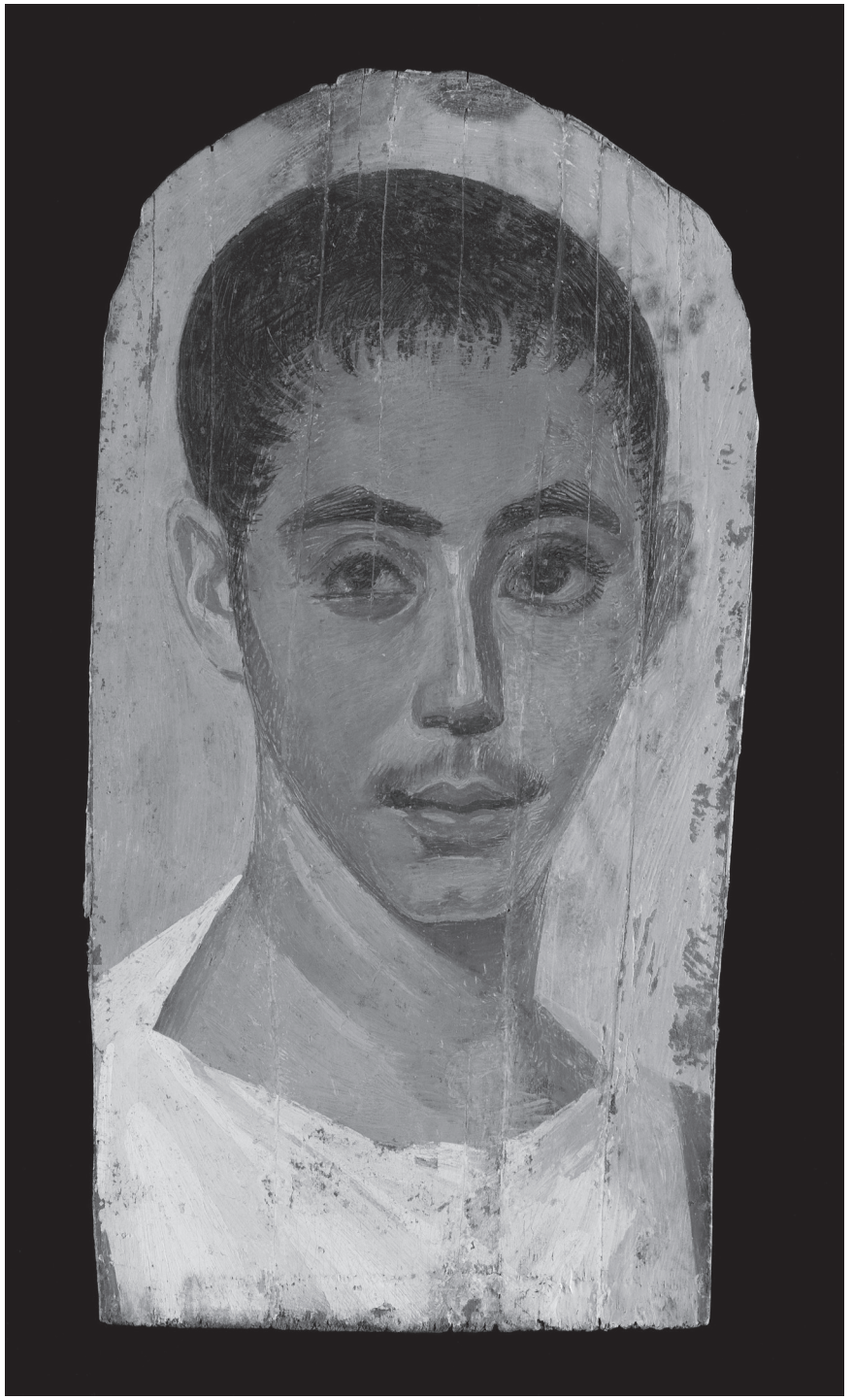

Figure I.5 Portrait of a youth with a surgical cut in one eye, 190–210 AD. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (source: www.metmuseum.org).

antiquity[17] to express the detachment of the spiritual man from his body and his physical appearance, as well as the opposition to any form of idolatry.[18]

Plato and Aristotle on mimetic art

The theme of the indifference to, if not rejection of, the mimetic representation of physical reality has its roots in Plato's philosophy,[19] and in particular in the *Republic*, where the suspicion of the imitative nature of art leads to its removal from the the paradigmatic model of the just *polis*. It is worth noting that the subject of this suspicion and censure is primarily poetry, but Plato's judgement also applies to the visual arts, because the effect they have on the soul is to seduce it and turn its admiration not to the real world of intelligible forms, but to a copy of it, and therefore to something which is ontologically second and less important.

The issue of the value of art in Plato is connected firstly to the soul and its articulation and is not specifically aesthetic but also affects the social structure and therefore the education of the members of the *kallipolis*. In fact, Plato's problem with art is due to its action on the soul, and in particular on the *thymoeides*, the spirited and irascible part, which must be properly trained to be guided by the *logistikon*. Mimetic poetry is able to alter the balance between the parts of the soul, and it is this concern that leads the philosopher to reprise in the tenth book of the *Republic* the same theme discussed in the second and third books, under a different, much deeper, onto-epistemological and not simply socio-pedagogical perspective.[20] Plato's view on art, however, cannot be limited to the *Republic*, and it is necessary to refer to other dialogues, such as the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*, as well, because they differ significantly from the ethical and political perspective.

The other main focus for a general reconstruction of the conceptions about art during antiquity is Aristotle, who (although, paradoxically, less artistically talented than Plato) presents a dual point of view, subjective and objective, in dealing with the problem of artistic production, and poetry in particular. His crucial assertion that tragedy is more philosophical and more serious than history[21] acts as antecedent of Plotinus' conception of the artist as able to access the intelligible form. The tragic poet, in fact, draws on the universal, unlike the

historian who focuses on the particular. Although tragic poetry adopts historical and mythological characters, it aims to reconstruct or invent what a specific type of person *might* say or do in a given situation, while chronicle describes what a specific individual has *actually* done. The difference is therefore between the universal and the particular. In the same way, one could say, the sculpture of a perfect athlete is related to a portrait of an individual: the idealized sculpture represents a universal which several athletes may well aspire to, while the portrait has a predominantly descriptive character.

Aristotle, probably in open opposition to Plato's conception, values at least one kind of poetry, the tragic, and gives a functional interpretation of it which, although renowned, still eludes our full understanding.[22] In Aristotle's view, the effectiveness of the poet resides in the mimetic invention and construction of the plot, a quality resembling more the activity of the Demiurge in the *Timeus* than the poetic mimesis in Plato's *Republic*.

It is in the *Timaeus*, in fact, that the subjective point of view of the artist involved with creative production is introduced through the myth of the divine maker or craftsman, who operates on inert matter, taking inspiration from a perfect archetype, the forms. It is surprising that the paradigm of the Demiurge is not always taken into account when seeking to understand Plato's aesthetic reflection, because it is in this figure, even if mythical, that it is possible to identify several key elements which illustrate the role of artistic creation in the relationship between the eternal forms and the sensible level.

The attention which over the centuries has been given to the similarities and the differences between the Platonic myth and the biblical account of creation in the Book of Genesis has distracted from other aspects that can help in understanding Plato's point of view. In particular, the analogy between the good god and the craftsman reflects an element of Plato's view on the way the artist creates. As Jackie Pigeaud[23] correctly emphasizes, the *Timaeus* is relevant to Platonic aesthetics in that it describes the activity of the artist.

The acknowledgement of the power of poetry in earlier dialogues such as the *Ion* and the *Phaedrus* is combined with some caution on its role, because poets and rhapsodes are certainly given high status, but at the same time they are portrayed as unable to be in control of their art, possessed by the god but

lacking a scientific knowledge of the subject of their poetry. In particular, in the *Ion*, the ineffectiveness of the rhapsodes and poets in directing their art is presented in a rather dismissive way, because they are possessed by the divine *enthousiasmos* and mere passive subjects of the magnetic action of the muse. They are intermediaries between the divine and those who assist their performances but remain devoid of merit in their art:

> οὐ γὰρ τέχνῃ ταῦτα λέγουσιν ἀλλὰ θείᾳ δυνάμει, ἐπεί, εἰ περὶ ἑνὸς τέχνῃ καλῶς ἠπίσταντο λέγειν, κἂν περὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἁπάντων· διὰ ταῦτα δὲ ὁ θεὸς ἐξαιρούμενος τούτων τὸν νοῦν τούτοις χρῆται ὑπηρέταις καὶ τοῖς χρησμῳδοῖς καὶ τοῖς μάντεσι τοῖς θείοις, ἵνα ἡμεῖς οἱ ἀκούοντες εἰδῶμεν ὅτι οὐχ οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ ταῦτα λέγοντες οὕτω πολλοῦ ἄξια, οἷς νοῦς μὴ πάρεστιν, ἀλλ᾽ ὁ θεὸς αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ λέγων, διὰ τούτων δὲ φθέγγεται πρὸς ἡμᾶς.
>
> They do this not by skill but through a divine force, since, if it were by skill that they knew how to speak well about one subject, they would also know how to do so about all other subjects. That is why the god takes away these people's reason and uses them as ministers and givers of oracles and divine prophets so that we who hear them may know that it is not these people, whose reason is not in them, who are saying these things which are so valuable; rather the god himself is the speaker and is addressing us through them.[24]

In the *Phaedrus*, however, it is pointed out that it is in inspiration, and not in mere technicality, that poetry can be accomplished:

> ὃς δ᾽ ἂν ἄνευ μανίας Μουσῶν ἐπὶ ποιητικὰς θύρας ἀφίκηται, πεισθεὶς ὡς ἄρα ἐκ τέχνης ἱκανὸς ποιητὴς ἐσόμενος, ἀτελὴς αὐτός τε καὶ ἡ ποίησις ὑπὸ τῆς τῶν μαινομένων ἡ τοῦ σωφρονοῦντος ἠφανίσθη.
>
> As for the man who comes to the doors of poetry without the madness of the Muses, convinced that skill will make him a satisfactory poet, he lacks fulfilment himself and the poetry of the sane and sober is eclipsed by that of the mad.[25]

This principle of *mania* or inspiration had already been stated in epic poetry, where at the beginning of a poem the muse and her inspiration are invoked, so that the poet is presented as in direct contact with the divine and becomes an intermediary. The problem for Plato, then, is that this inspiration is independent from the skills and from the moral quality of the poet.

The suspicion of poetry and art in the *Republic* – for this matter as for many other ethical and political issues – stands as a bold break in a strong tradition. Aristotle, on the other hand, opposing Plato's view, rehabilitates poetry for its gnoseological value in its search for the universal.

Late antique aesthetics in this book

It is by considering the background of the philosophical tradition on these issues that this volume will focus on some texts related in one way or another to aesthetic problems. This is, however, a notoriously risky task: in Anne Sheppard's and Oleg Bychkov's words:

> discussions of what we would now call 'aesthetic' topics can certainly be found in antiquity, since it had its share of treatments of both beauty and art, although the meaning of both these terms was rather different in the ancient world. Ancient authors do discuss in their own way a wide range of issues concerning the nature of beauty, the principles of art, and the questions of both the appreciation of art and its production by artists.[26]

The problem of how to detect elements which can be connected to aesthetics is even more complex in the case of late antique thinkers, because their perspective is often transcendent and the reflection on beauty is never confined to the natural world but finds its archetypal source in the divine. The aesthetic issues in late antiquity are numerous and only selected themes will be analysed here. If aesthetic values are not autonomous,[27] the possibility to understand late antique taste and sensibility lies in our ability to recognize the specific civilization of the time.[28]

Only by being aware of the challenge of these limitations is it possible to observe Plotinus' interest in some specific themes connected with aesthetics. In the following chapters I will try to focus on some aspects of his reflection which are less well known in relation to beauty and art, but are nevertheless worthy of examination. At the same time I will draw attention to the Christian circle of the Cappadocian Fathers, and especially Gregory of Nyssa, who shows a deep interest in Plotinus' thought. The category of Christian Neoplatonism is applied in this discussion to those thinkers who integrate their Christian faith

with theological but more often psychological, ethical and indeed aesthetic concepts derived from the Neoplatonists.[29]

Although combining thinkers from different perspectives has been rejected in the past as irrelevant to the history of philosophy, this is an inaccurate attitude that has been successfully overcome by viewing historical reconstruction as independent from ideological considerations. An example of this new approach is *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*,[30] where appropriately Christian thinkers are presented alongside pagan philosophers. This of course does not deny the differences between a philosophical approach that is based on rational discussion and the reflection of faith on the revelation. With a few important differences, however, some specific analogies can be noted, because on the one hand Christian authors draw on pagan philosophy and appropriate, more or less explicitly, the categories of classical thought and, on the other, philosophical reflection is enhanced (or diluted depending on the point of view) by the spiritual influence of eastern religions. Therefore the contrasts and the theoretical differences between the two systems can be seen as less pronounced.

The focus on Gregory of Nyssa is motivated by his being, among the Christian Greek writers of the early centuries, the closest to the Neoplatonic position, and in particular the one who was most influenced by Plotinus. There is no unanimity on the depth of such influence, as some claim that it is constant and predominant while others tend to minimize it. As I tried to show in a previous study,[31] it seems that Gregory's position is to be understood as not so much affected by Plotinus' general system, but specifically by the philosopher's reflection on the union with the divine. As will be seen in the course of this volume, the first treatise written by Plotinus, *On the beautiful*, has left a strong mark in the early works of Gregory of Nyssa, in particular in his treatise *De virginitate*. The very fact that the issue of the beautiful has affected Gregory's mysticism reveals that the aesthetic themes overlap with the mystic ones. And this is true both for Plotinus and for Gregory, as they participate in the same spiritual perspective, even amid their obvious differencies.

Of the other Christian authors influenced by Neoplatonism, at least two must be mentioned, even if they are later than Gregory. In the Latin-speaking world, Augustine has permeated western culture and also the aesthetic reflection. In particular it is through the mediation of Ambrose that Augustine

came to know the high cultural level of Greek Christian thought and the spiritual or allegorical exegesis practised by Origen and inherited by the Cappadocians. This kind of interpretation allowed Augustine to find a key to understanding the sacred scriptures in accordance with philosophical concepts.

Augustine's thought is linked to Plotinus but also to the Cappadocians, though not perhaps to the same extent, since he could not read the Greek text of the Cappadocians while he read Plotinus in a Latin translation. His role in this cultural mediation has been of enormous historic importance since it informed all the Latin Middle Ages until the advent of Scholasticism, and has remained a stable reference point even later, until the Renaissance, as opposed to the perceived sterility of Scholastic rationalism.

Another key figure in the relationship between Christian and pagan thought, again of great historical importance for his influence on the Middle Ages, is Ps. Dionysius. His version of Neoplatonism, however, is not derived from Plotinus but is markedly later, inspired by Proclus, and therefore very different from Plotinus or the Cappadocians.

The following chapters will therefore focus on some elements of the aesthetics of the period. The first two, of a more general character, will concern Plotinus' use of metaphors related to art and Gregory of Nyssa's connection with Neoplatonism, and Plotinus in particular. The other three chapters will analyse more specific issues, from the paraenetic metaphor of sculpting in Plotinus and Gregory of Nyssa, to the Cappadocian Fathers' view on the didactic role of painting, reflections on the beauty of gold and light, and the paradoxical aspects of the soul's response to beauty.

All these philosophical and rhetorical elements to varying degrees also influenced the artistic production of the time. This influence is sometimes almost random and certainly cannot be defined as intentional. Moreover, on a philosophical level, what develops after Plotinus and the Cappadocians somehow alters the memory of Classicism that was still alive in them. The overall aim of this volume is therefore to focus on the moment of transition between the third and fourth centuries when, in philosophy as in art, old and new, classical culture and Christian civilization overlap. As in the portraits of the emperors of the third century, the philosophers' and Christian authors' teetering world shows its ambivalence but also its melancholic beauty.

1

Rhetoric and Aesthetics in Plotinus

The expressive purpose of the metaphor in Plotinus

The use of metaphors in Plotinus has a methodological role akin to that of dialogue for Socrates and Plato. As for them, dialogue is the correct way to conduct a philosophical search, as is, for Plotinus, metaphorical expression the tool to convey the realities which lie beyond human language. The metaphor operates an emotional short-circuit in the reader,[1] in that it activates different levels of the psyche with an eminently anagogic goal. In this sense, like dialogue for Socrates and Plato, metaphors and the images for Plotinus are not merely a form of expression but are chosen due to an internal necessity of his philosophy.[2]

For this reason it is necessary to discuss first the role of Plotinus' metaphors, and particularly those related to visual arts, in his philosophical system. A metaphor connected to a specific form of poetic art, that of life as theatre and of the soul as an actor, will then be analysed as an example of the philosophical efficacy of Plotinus' rhetorical devices. The many levels of Plotinus' image of theatre and the different degrees of beings that it includes are a significative example of his ability to convey philosophical content through the rhetorical use of metaphor of art.

Many metaphors and images adopted by Plotinus are inspired by visual arts. These date back to rhetorical traditions well before him,[3] and can be reconnected to the interest that even from the archaic period the epic tradition showed for productive activities. It should also be noted that, conforming to Greek and Roman culture, many of the metaphors related to artistic activities are used from the point of view of the material production and equiparate to any craft, although in some cases the attention of Plotinus is specifically addressed to that we can define as artistic creation.

Maria Di Pasquale Barbanti explained how the metaphor has a specific function within philosophical expression: 'The metaphor, far from being a mere figure of speech, is full of philosophical meaning. It constitutes an innovation in the linguistic code, is an instrument of knowledge and, therefore, [. . .] rather than to the "syntax" it belongs to semantics and to philosophy.'[4]

Aristotle had already indicated, both in the *Poetics*[5] and in the *Rhetoric*,[6] the elements to define the logical-philosophical role of metaphor, giving to logic the function of identifying the verisimilitude through which the rhetorical persuasion can operate. If, as Derrida argues,[7] the use of metaphors is necessary to philosophical expression, it is particularly inevitable in the case of the thinkers whose horizon is specifically metaphysical, and of the mystical writers.

The use of metaphor exerts a protreptic function through its didactic properties, when the semantic gap between the real meaning and the figurative one in the metaphoric term is neutralized. An important element of a metaphor is surprise, which captures the attention of the reader and excites the imagination, charging the metaphor with an emotional power.[8]

There are in Plotinus many metaphors related to the visual arts but, as Ferwerda explains,[9] they are mainly traditional and not original enough to convey key elements of the thought of Plotinus. Nevertheless, although not always innovative (which can be said of many other metaphors in Plotinus), they often have great beauty of expression.

Usually the references and the metaphors related to statuary are adopted in an anti-Aristotelic context to indicate the opposition between matter and form in the relationship between body and soul. In a statue, its material is distinct from its form, for example in *Enn*. II 5 (25) 1, 12–20, or *Enn*. VI 3 (44) 22, 1–12, where the the statue is considered to clarify the passage from potency to act.[10]

Surprisingly, the interest of Plotinus towards the arts is less affected by Plato's condemnation of them and more connected to later reflections in Hellenistic rhetoric and Cicero.[11] In *Enn*. V 8 (31) 1, Plotinus notoriously gives one of the more decisive considerations about the nature of artistic production and its epistemological value, in contrast with the position of Plato.[12] When talking about the statue of Zeus made by Phidias[13] he confers to the sculptor the ability to contemplate the *eidos* of the god without referring to a visible model, and to represent him as he would appear if he decided to manifest

himself, because the arts can give beauty to matter: Εἶτα καὶ ὅτι πολλὰ παρ᾽ αὐτῶν ποιοῦσι καὶ προστιθέασι δέ, ὅτῳ τι ἐλλείπει, ὡς ἔχουσαι τὸ κάλλος.Ἐπεὶ καὶ ὁ Φειδίας τὸν Δία πρὸς οὐδὲν αἰσθητὸν ποιήσας, ἀλλὰ λαβὼν οἷος ἂν γένοιτο, εἰ ἡμῖν ὁ Ζεὺς δι᾽ ὀμμάτων ἐθέλοι φανῆναι.[14] In fact, as demonstrated by Oiva Kuisma,[15] the difference of Plotinus from Platonic thought must be considered in a less accentuated way, since the artistic representation in Plotinus' view still remains on the material level, and if the artist has the ability to grasp the intelligible form of his model, it is always the form that the divine model would take if he decided to manifest himself to mortal eyes. This is, in fact, Proclus' view,[16] as demonstrated by Anne Sheppard.[17] It is also true, on the other hand, as Kuisma emphasizes, that we do not even know if Plotinus ever saw Phidias' work, because we do not have any documentation about him visiting Olympia.[18] We must therefore assume that he adopts the common conception about the excellence of Phidias' Zeus in Olympia, and it is not correct to attribute to the philosopher a specific interest in this work of art.

It is also clear, however, that the appreciation of the arts in Plotinus is testified by the use he makes of metaphors. It seems that sculpting is a preferred image for Plotinus, but painting and architecture are also present in the metaphors adopted by him. Plotinus' metaphors are fuelled by a power of expression that is independent from the strictly philosophical understanding of artistic activity, and confer a high literary value to his words. In this sense, Plotinus' writing could be compared to the kind of impressionistic painting that developed around the second and third century AD, in the sense that it is the overall effect, rather than refinement of the detail, which qualifies the expressive strength of the sentences. Porphyry tells that Plotinus did not revise what he had written, entrusting it to his disciple and biographer, who would then operate a degree of correction. Porphyry also highlights how Plotinus' specific accent led him to spelling errors. In general, however, it seems that Porphyry's intervention in the texts was marginal, which explains certain inconsistencies and sometimes the lack of an immediately visible structure in the treatises.[19] If it can be said that Plotinus' writing is impressionistic, then this is in the sense that his lack of interest in a clean formal expression aims to enhance precisely the emotional impact on the listener and reader.

Plotinus tends to consider the artist and the image he creates in the context of the Platonic tradition and in general of the ancient conception of productive

activity.[20] If we leave aside *Enn.* V 8, his view on art has not, at least at first glance, distinguished theoretical elements that stand out among the conceptions of antiquity. For the most part, the metaphors and the images related to art present the artistic product as an imitation, and they have their roots, in one way or another, in earlier authors, which is also true for the exaltation of Phidias and of artistic creation, which in fact is a literary convention. Plotinus' thought, however, is imbued with new elements despite his belief of recovering the true Platonic tradition. Plato remains the starting point, but Plotinus' exegesis and his exclusive concentration on certain issues lead to a different system, more respondent to the needs of his time.[21] This correspondence led to the influence of Plotinus on the culture of late antiquity, including Christianity.

But it is not always in relation to art that Plotinus had an impact on artistic production. As will be analysed further, the reflection on the beauty of gold, for example, is not connected in his thought to artistic production because it is focused on the philosophical problem of why simple beings are beautiful; it nevertheless mirrors the new sensibility of late antiquity.

Among the passages with metaphors or images related to artworks, Plotinus sometimes refers to the portrait of Socrates, in the obvious sense of the portrait of an individual. Despite the traditional reflection on the portrait of the philosopher and the philosophical value of the dycotomy between Socrates' physiognomy and his interiority[22] as theorized in *Symp*. 215a-b, in fact these passages focus on ontological problems. In *Enn*. VI 2 (43), *On the genera of being II*, 1, 23, Plotinus argues that it would be absurd to put under the same genus being and non-being, because it would be like uniting under the same genus Socrates and his portrait: Γελοῖον γὰρ ὑφ΄ ἓν θέσθαι τὸ ὂν τῷ μὴ ὄντι, ὥσπερ ἄν εἴ τις Σωκράτη ὑπὸ τὸ αὐτὸ θεῖτο καὶ τὴν τούτου εἰκόνα.

In the third treatise *On the genera of being*, *Enn*. VI 3 (44) 15, 30, about the relationship between the *logos* and the individual, the portrait is mentioned as made of mere pigments and nevertheless called by the same name as the real person: Οἷον εἰ ἀνθρώπου ὄντος τοῦ Σωκράτους τοῦ ὁρωμένου ἡ εἰκὼν αὐτοῦ ἡ ἐν γραφῇ χρώματα καὶ φάρμακα ὄντα Σωκράτης λέγοιτο.

Plotinus refers to the portraits of Socrates also in *Enn*. V 7 (18), *On whether there are ideas of particular beings*, 1, 22 to question the existence of a single archetype for all individuals: οὐ γὰρ ὡς αἱ εἰκόνες Σωκράτους πρὸς τὸ

ἀρχέτυπον, ἀλλὰ δεῖ τὴν διάφορον ποίησιν ἐκ διαφόρων λόγων. He therefore refers to the portrait of Socrates as an individual always in connection with metaphysical questions on the relationship between form and matter and not for its artistic value nor for its paedagogical significance.

The anamnestic and anagogic role of art

Another text deals with the issue of the mere materiality of the work of art, which confuses and misleads, but with a different focus on its superior ability to refer to the intelligible archetype. Says Plotinus in *Enn*. II 9 (33) (*Against the Gnostics*) 16, 36–56:

> οὐδὲ τὸ ζητεῖν περὶ τούτων ἔμφρονος, ἀλλὰ τυφλοῦ τινος καὶ παντάπασιν οὔτε αἴσθησιν οὔτε νοῦν ἔχοντος καὶ πόρρω τοῦ νοητὸν κόσμον ἰδεῖν ὄντος, ὃς τοῦτον οὐ βλέπει. Τίς γὰρ ἂν μουσικὸς ἀνὴρ εἴη, ὃς τὴν ἐν νοητῷ ἁρμονίαν ἰδὼν οὐ κινήσεται τῆς ἐν φθόγγοις αἰσθητοῖς ἀκούων; Ἢ τίς γεωμετρίας καὶ ἀριθμῶν ἔμπειρος, ὃς τὸ σύμμετρον καὶ ἀνάλογον καὶ τεταγμένον ἰδὼν δι' ὀμμάτων οὐχ ἡσθήσεται; Εἴπερ οὐχ ὁμοίως τὰ αὐτὰ βλέπουσιν οὐδ' ἐν ταῖς γραφαῖς οἱ δι'ὀμμάτων τὰ τῆς τέχνης βλέποντες, ἀλλ' ἐπιγινώσκοντες μίμημα ἐν τῷ αἰσθητῷ τοῦ ἐν νοήσει κειμένου οἷον θορυβοῦνται καὶ εἰς ἀνάμνησιν ἔρχονται τοῦ ἀληθοῦς· ἐξ οὗ δὴ πάθους καὶ κινοῦνται οἱ ἔρωτες. Ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἰδὼν κάλλος ἐν προσώπῳ εὖ μεμιμημένον φέρεται ἐκεῖ, ἀργὸς δὲ τίς οὕτως ἔσται τὴν γνώμην καὶ εἰς οὐδὲν ἄλλο κινήσεται, ὥστε ὁρῶν σύμπαντα μὲν τὰ ἐν αἰσθητῷ κάλλη, σύμπασαν δὲ συμμετρίαν καὶ τὴν μεγάλην εὐταξίαν ταύτην καὶ τὸ ἐμφαινόμενον ἐν τοῖς ἄστροις εἶδος καὶ πόρρωθεν οὖσιν οὐκ ἐντεῦθεν ἐνθυμεῖται, καὶ σέβας αὐτὸν λαμβάνει, οἷα ἀφ' οἵων; Οὐκ ἄρα οὔτε ταῦτα κατενόησεν, οὔτε ἐκεῖνα εἶδεν.
>
> The very question can be entertained by no intelligent being but only by one so blind, so utterly devoid of perception and thought, so far from any vision of the Intellectual Universe as not even to see this world of our own. For how could there be a musician who sees the melody in the intelligible world and will not be stirred when he hears the melody in sensible sounds? Or how could there be anyone skilled in geometry and numbers who will not be pleased when he sees right relation, proportion and order in his eyes? For, indeed, even in pictures those who look at works of art with their eyes do not see the same things in the same way,

> but when they recognize an imitation on the level of sense of someone who has a place in their thought they feel a kind of disturbance and come to a recollection of truth; this is the experience from which passionate love arises. But if someone who sees beauty excellently represented in a face is carried to that higher world, will anyone be so sluggish in mind and so immovable that, when he sees all the beauties in the world of sense, all its good proportion and the mighty excellence of its order, and the splendour of form which is manifested in the stars, for all their remoteness, he will not thereupon think, seized with reverence, 'What wonders, and from what a source?' If he did not, he would neither have understood this world here nor seen the higher world.[23]

Although this passage refers primarily to the beauty of the world, it also regards the beauty of the arts, starting from music[24] and with reference to painting, again mentioned in relation to its humble materials, but with attention to its power to activate an intellectual recognition in the viewer. If we consider a painting for what it is on its material side, that is a support coated with pigments held together by a medium, it is clear that the simplicity of these elements could not rouse any special interest on the part of the observer. However, if its anamnestic function is activated, the subject of the painting stimulates a specific reaction, which is not connected with the materiality of the picture itself.

Vision is the focus of Plotinus' anagogy, a vision which is material but leads to a higher contemplation of intelligible forms. If the material work of art offers the metaphoric term to unveil the fallacy of the sensible world, at the same time the intelligible element introduced by the artist allows a spiritual meaning to be conveyed.

From this point of view, then, the metaphors of the painting or the statue are effective ways to highlight the dialectic between the sensible and the intelligible. They are adopted by Plotinus to express the causal relationship between form and matter, to convey in an immediate way the lack of value of matter, which is invested of ontological status only when subject to form, and above all to activate an emotional response in the reader.

Artistic images provide copies, and these copies are imperfect or even false, and yet they allow a certain degree of knowledge of the model they try to reproduce. The metaphors related to visual arts, like all other metaphors, on

the one hand are insufficient to represent reality, but on the other give to Plotinus a potent tool of expression.

In Plotinus' metaphors the artist indicates the active role of the intelligible world, and therefore he is not a mystifier, but rather an introducer of order and rationality. It is of course true that Plotinus never ceases to stress that the images he uses are imperfect, because, as he says in *Enn*. II 9 (33) 4, 14, the artist produces for the need to obtain a profit,[25] while the divine is self-sufficient. But this specification is valid only up to a certain point, because it does not consider the unrestricted nature of artistic creation, which in principle does not require an immediate reward.

The figurative arts, precisely because they are linked to vision, offer therefore a series of functional images to express different elements of Plotinus' system. They give him the opportunity to indicate the difference between the intelligible realm, which corresponds to the living archetype in the metaphor of artistic creation, and the sensible world, which is an inferior copy devoid of ontological autonomy, similar to an artistic reproduction. In this context, it is clear that the arts are interpreted, as in Plato, as a misleading effort. They are considered not under the criterion of beauty but in ontological terms, and therefore they appear not only lower than the nature which they imitate, but also insincere and teasing.

The arts, however, also have an intelligible content which enables them to be used as metaphoric terms in a different and more positive way, because the contrast between the sensible and the intelligible takes place within the artwork itself, where the material acquires meaning only through the intelligible structure. It is only the *eidos* that gives ontological dignity to the flat, coloured surfaces or to the masses of marble. The use of metaphors related to the arts is more compelling than those related to production in general, because the artist is able to insert an intelligible meaning which can be found only in a weaker way in other kinds of craft production.

The metaphor therefore is not simply a rational process of association between two terms, but includes an emotional element which activates and intensifies understanding. That, in itself, is an artistic effect, of which Plotinus, whether conscious or not, was master. This understanding through metaphors is valid when it leads the interlocutor to see and touch the invisible reality and, Platonically, to fall in love with it.

Plotinus' view on the world through a metaphor of art

In one of his last treatises, Plotinus adopts a metaphor, widely used in antiquity and with a strong later tradition, which is linked to artistic, and specifically poetic, creation. As in the *Timeus* it is possible to detect a revealing side of Plato's vision of art, in the same way as in Chapters 16–18 of the first treatise *On Providence*, *Enn.* III 2 (47), through the metaphor of life as theatre, Plotinus expresses his general view of the artist as the creator of a world, and incidentally clarifies his vision of artistic creation.

This metaphor, much used in both ancient and modern literature, should be understood in two ways. In one sense, life in the sensible world can be assimilated to the fictive representation of the drama, and therefore it is not to be taken seriously and the soul should not be intimitated; in another sense, the metaphor indicates that the universal *logos* confers order to the *cosmos* like a poet/director, giving to each soul a specific and diverse part, as the different characters in a drama contribute to its accomplishment. The central role of this metaphor in the context of Plotinus' reflection on providence is highlighted by the shift of style that occurs in the three chapters compared to the rest of the treatise, with an abundance of images and the reference to artistic activity, closely related to everyday life and aimed at capturing the reader's attention.

The careful and constant use of images related to the artistic field and to theatre[26] in particular, with reference to dancing, singing and stage performance, offers metaphors of the human condition and the activity of the *logos* within the *cosmos*. The motif of human life as a stage play is widely used in ancient philosophy: it can be found for example in Seneca,[27] Epictetus[28] and Marcus Aurelius.[29] Well before the Stoics of the imperial age, it was adopted by Plato, who in *Leg.* 817b-d had already used it, and it is also found in the first Sceptics.[30] The Cynic Oenomaus of Gadara also illustrated the scope of human freedom through the metaphor of the actor.[31]

Given the importance of the theatrical experience in the ancient world, the analogy between theatre and human life marks in Plotinus the intention to introduce the reader to a complex doctrine through immediately comprehensible comparisons.

Two stages can be identified in the use of this metaphor, a subjective one, which highlights the fictional essence of human affairs, and an objective one

which emphasizes the variety of characters in a play, similar to the diversity of beings in the universe.[32] In the first moment, everything which in human life is related to the body, pains and pleasures as well as birth and death, is destitute of any value, since the existence of this world is nothing but a theatre with mere scene changes, as opposed to the intelligible sphere, where true reality resides. The second context of the metaphor instead considers the diversity of characters in a drama, some good and some not, some illustrious and others obscure, in the same way in which the universe displays a variety of beings, all different and sometimes conflicting. Both aspects of the metaphor have a protreptic value, in that the former exhorts detachment from the events of the sensible world, while the second one aims to justify the complexity of the universe.

The main focus of the metaphor is the term ποιητής, with indicates both the poet and the maker of the universe, and the consideration of the world as a ποίημα, a poetic creation and at the same time a natural product. The relationship between freedom[33] and cosmic order is expressed through the role of the soul as an actor, an entity which is independent from the characters played and remains the same even if the plays change.[34]

Only in reference to the world of theatre and to the relationship between author and actor is it possible to understand the solution proposed by Plotinus to the problem of the individual and his place in the cosmic order. The role of the actor, which could appear to be limiting with respect to the freedom of the soul, on the contrary corresponds perfectly to Plotinus' vision. If in the subjective context of metaphor the sensible world is a stage fiction, the individual soul is an actor. The actor's life is independent from the drama, because he exists before and after the artistic performance is executed,[35] and this is the point of contact which Plotinus identifies between the activity of the actor and the immortality of the soul. The emphasis on the role and independence of the actor is meant to explain that the soul, like the actor, may give an excellent performance in its life, or on the contrary might not train enough nor improve, and then give a sloppy and faded interpretation.

The centrality of the metaphor of the theatre clarifies the role of the soul and the objective unreality of the physical world and of the events associated with it, but there is another aspect to be highlighted, which is the activity of the *logos*. The analogy with drama is helpful in understanding the whole semantic

field that this concept has in Plotinus: the *logos*, in fact, in the metaphor shows a specific semantic diversity and should be understood as the plot of the drama as well as its author. In the plot, the unifying function of the *logos*, derived from Heraclitus, leads to a higher harmony of opposites, as in a drama, which has many contrasts both of events and of characters but nevertheless finds its beauty and unity exactly in their opposition. Moreover, it must be observed that the *logos* of the play, its plot, is expressed through the *logoi* said by the actors.[36] In the metaphor of the drama, then, the function of the *logos* is the unifying motif.

Finally, in the context of metaphor the role of the author is identified with that of the *logos* too, but, even more significantly, in the metaphor the author is also the director of the play, in order to express that the *logos* directs the cosmic representation and makes it appropriate to the plan he has set himself, full of contrasts which produce a harmonious and beautiful unity. The role of the actors is crucial because the drama is performed *through* them; they pronounce the appropriate *logoi* and in doing so allow the *logos* of the drama to be carried out. The author and director knows the overall design of the play, but in order to implement it he must hire many actors, each one with different characteristics and qualities. The same director provides all necessary things, such as clothing and masks,[37] but the actors are responsible for their own interpretation, which should be accurate regardless of their individual roles. Otherwise, the unwilling or unfit actor is replaced.

The metaphor at this point becomes clearer, since the plan of the *logos*, which leads the different contrasting beings and events to unity, is not given once and for all but is carried out and guided by a director, as in a drama, and this is precisely what providence is. Souls can play the role that is assigned to them according to their own characteristics, but if one of them does not perform well, it can be replaced, and the role that it had been assigned in life can be, in a new reincarnation, given to someone else, and that soul has to accept a worse and less distinguished condition. Plotinus in this metaphor, then, tries to integrate diverse elements within a universal design that ultimately finds its root in the One. His vision is expressed through the image of the theatre as a way to account for all the aspects of reality which at first glance do not seem to fall within a rational pattern. The metaphor of art, then, becomes the ultimate method of expressing the complexity of the human condition.

2

Philosophy and Culture of Gregory of Nyssa

The impact of philosophy on Christianity

Having seen Plotinus' attitude towards art and rhetorical expression, it is useful now to turn our attention to the specific element which characterizes the transformation of ancient civilization – that is, its encounter with Christianity. The conciliatory attitude towards classical culture which educated Christians had, at least after the Edict of Milan, informed Gregory of Nyssa's view, as he shared the same cultural climate in which his brother Basil wrote his famous *Address to young men*. However, the relationship between Christians and pagan culture, and in particular philosophy, had not always been conciliatory. The whole tradition of pagan culture raised for Christians the issue of how to interact with its system of values. It was in fact in a context strongly marked by these elements that the followers of the new faith were to live and work, and against that system they often had to take a position.

The reactions of Christians to the pagan world had produced a number of different positions, from those who uncompromisingly refused to accept any element which could be associated with the Babylon of the Apocalypse, to those who considered useful, if not unavoidable, that Christians should appropriate the best achievements of pagan culture to enrich their faith.[1] The tensions that arose from such divergent views were to result in conflicts within the Christian community which were difficult to reconcile. Radical instances thrived in the rejection of pagan culture and of every aspect of worldly demands, and gave birth on the one hand to heretical movements, on the other to the constellation of monastic life.

The process of encounter and confrontation with pagan civilization had already begun with the preaching of Paul, who in his speech at the Areopagus[2]

addressed pagan philosophers, both Epicureans and Stoics, who listened to him with interest until he started talking about resurrection of the dead, which they judged an absurdity. The episode became commonplace among the Fathers to indicate the relationship of Christian thought with the philosophical doctrines of the Hellenistic and imperial age. The treatment received by Paul and Barnabas at Lystra,[3] where as a result of a miracle the crowd believed that they were respectively Hermes and Zeus, and therefore wanted to offer them a sacrifice (to which the two replied by tearing their clothes and claiming to be mere men), captures the difficulty of adapting the contents of the new faith to the popular conception of the divine. The very fact that the New Testament writings, with the exception perhaps of the first version of the Gospel of Matthew, were composed in Greek, confirms the willingness on the part of Christianity to face the Greek and Roman civilization.

In the relationship with the pagan world, the crucial first half of the fourth century marks a change of perspective: the Christian thinkers, from the initial justification of their faith in the apologetic literature, assumed in many ways a leading role in the culture of the period, because of their new political prestige. A direct consequence of this change was the different way in which they confronted the elements of secular origin.

Christianity and the Platonic tradition

An aspect which is immediately apparent in the Fathers' view on philosophy is the universal condemnation of the materialistic doctrines developed during the Hellenistic period, despite the fact that some elements, particularly those of Stoic origin,[4] influenced the Christian thought. Even the Aristotelian tradition was considered with some suspicion by Christians as too specialized to attract their consideration.

It is with Platonism, instead, that Christian thought combined willingly, in a conjugation which proved most significant from the point of view of philosophy. The exact evaluation of the influence of Platonic thought on Christian authors is still a matter of debate.[5] René Arnou's point of view[6] on the Platonic elements incorporated in Christian thinking is still valid, even if he somehow avoided the problem of the way in which Platonism was received,

and in particular what were its transformations among Christians. To these problems Endre von Ivánka devoted his studies,[7] considering that the Platonic tradition influenced Clement, Origen and the Cappadocians unequivocally but with different outcomes, and in particular focused on their transformation of Platonic thought. In his desire to safeguard the specificity of Christian reflection, von Ivánka was perhaps not entirely correct, in particular with regards to Gregory of Nyssa, who, in the view of the scholar, differs from the Platonic tradition mainly because he attributes man's union with the divine to the exclusive action of grace, unlike Plotinus and the Neoplatonists. For these, in fact, the mystic union derives ineluctably from *theoria* or contemplation, in the sense of the result of a dialectical exercise. It is necessary, however, to consider that the union with the divine in Gregory, although it relies on a divine gift, is a direct consequence of the constitution of man, who participates in the divine nature through his *nous*. If this is the point of union between God and the creature, it follows that the correct use of the noetic activity leads necessarily to the unification, the ὁμοίωσις Θεῷ of the Platonic tradition, which Gregory interprets as the main goal of Christian life. In this sense, therefore, the distance that von Ivánka and other scholars recognized between Gregory and the Platonic tradition is less accentuated.

Many of the characteristics of Platonism, far more than all other philosophical systems, could suit the demands of Christianity, namely the immateriality of the intelligible world, the resulting corollary of the immortality of the soul, and speculation on the origin of the world. These are elements that Christians were able to recover, consciously drawing on the the first Apologists' belief that Plato depended on the writings of Moses.

The concept of the recovery of the Platonic tradition by Christians means that in the first instance the conceptions expressed in Plato's dialogues were readapted to the new religion. If this is certainly true with respect to the first two centuries of Christianity, from Origen[8] on it is necessary to consider other inputs, still within the Platonic tradition, but not drawn exclusively from Plato, but also from the Middle-Platonists.

In the first half of the fourth century,[9] the Platonism known to Christians was the revisited one of the Middle- and Neoplatonists, who introduced new elements within the tradition that inspired them, or simply highlighted old motifs revitalizing them with eastern religious doctrines. The fact that, for

example, Plotinus' writings were known to the more educated Christians is attested by Eusebius, who in the *Praeparatio Evangelica* quotes some of the philosophers' texts.

It seems therefore convincing that the specific version of Platonism of the Middle- and Neoplatonists more strongly influenced Christian thought after the third century, both for reasons of chronological proximity, and, at a deeper level, for the affinity between the two systems. And this happened despite the more or less strong aversion that the Neoplatonists felt towards the new faith, and the resulting bitterness on the part of the Christians.

This is usually acknowledged with respect to some theological concepts, in particular the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, but it is more seldom recognized in the case of other issues which are certainly less central, but not less worthy of interest in Christian thought. That Gregory of Nyssa drew on Plotinus, at least for the vocabulary of the mystical doctrine,[10] as well as for the elaboration of the doctrine of the Trinity, which integrates the work of his brother Basil, is well known.[11] In works of a different subject, however, such as the formation of the universe and the nature of man, Gregory has been interpreted more as an eclectic thinker, while in fact his use of elements derived from Plotinus, and partially from Porphyry, is constant, though perhaps, in spite of their presence throughout his whole output, most visible in his early works. It is therefore clear that Gregory knows and uses the Neoplatonists, Plotinus and Porphyry in particular, of course in a critical and cautious way.

It could be useful to highlight some features of Neoplatonism and particularly what constitutes its difference with the previous Platonic tradition. In fact the differences between Platonism and the first Neoplatonism have not always been acknowledged, and some have retraced a direct derivation from Plato and, to a greater extent, the Old Academy and the young Aristotle. Philip Merlan,[12] for example, did not find substantial differences between the Platonic tradition of the classical and Hellenistic age and what we call the Neoplatonic schools. The studies of the last decades, however, have revealed that Neoplatonism represents a break with the Platonic tradition, especially in going beyond the horizon of classical metaphysics.[13]

In the emphasis on the transcendence of the First Principle, Neoplatonism exceeds the notion of causality of the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions, and develops a doctrine of negation of classical ontology, a me-ontology, which is

to be the basis of the so-called 'negative theology'. The latter is one of the elements of Neoplatonism which had a longer and stronger heritage, especially in Christianity and Islam, at least until the rediscovery of the Aristotelian tradition in Scholasticism, with the consequent return to a theology contained within the terms of the ontology. The negative theology theorized by Proclus but already recognizable in Plotinus was developed in the exegesis of Plato's *Parmenides*.[14] The Neoplatonists interpreted the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, which is negative, as the theory of the One as the First Principle.

Given this perspective that breaks with the previous tradition, other aspects of Neoplatonism can be understood in their new value, in particular those relating to the conduct of man and his union with the divine (as popularized by Porphyry's *Sententiae*), which had some influence on Christian authors. The Christian thinkers, including Gregory of Nyssa, did not renounce the classical ontology, because to do so would be to oppose the wording of the Bible (especially the divine self-revelation of *Ex*. 3, 14), but it can also be recognized that both Origen and Gregory came to conclusions which are similar to those of the Neoplatonists, the former when he says that God is superior to *nous* and *ousia*,[15] the latter specifying that he is superior to all beings,[16] the *nous* and the *ousia*[17] and the Good.[18] If a kind of negative theology can be found sporadically in Gregory,[19] among the Christians it was explicitly elaborated by Ps. Dionysius, who followed Proclus' example. It is nevertheless true that the Plotinian themes of the escape and the ecstasy were soon assimilated in some Christian circles, and Gregory is a notable example for that. Moreover, as it is well known, the theory of the principles developed by Plotinus also influenced, although perhaps only at the semantic level, the elaboration of the doctrine of the Trinity.

In order to better understand how Gregory adopted, within his system, certain elements of Neoplatonic thought, it can also be helpful to give an overview of his philosophical background and to determine which authors and texts, in particular Neoplatonic, he actually knew.

The Platonic tradition in Gregory of Nyssa

It is not easy to determine what kind of education Gregory had, since the details of his life are not always clear.[20] From what can be inferred from his

correspondence and the letters of the two other Cappadocians, integrated with the comparison with his other writings, it is possible to reconstruct some aspects of his education and his knowledge of philosophy and literature.[21]

One of the most controversial facts of his biography is his marriage,[22] which is not without consequences with regard to his education, since it is certain that, after having held the office of reader of the church, he devoted himself to the rhetorical profession, like his father Basil the Elder. It seems that while he was a rhetor he got married. His first education, therefore, must have been in Greek pagan literature, as was usual for the time, alongside the necessary training for access to the role of church reader. These two elements, apparently at a later time, were integrated by his interest in philosophy, which might have come to Gregory through the mediation of Basil, who with Gregory of Nazianzus had studied in Constantinople and Athens at the most accredited schools. The cultural dependence on the teaching of his brother, which Gregory himself proclaims,[23] should not be understood in a strictly literal sense, since he disagrees with Basil on some crucial points, and more generally he seems to use different sources.

It is certainly true that Gregory's reflection concerns Christian issues which are not specifically related to pagan culture, and that philosophically he is under the predominant influence of Philo and Origen; it is however clear not only that he read Plotinus but also that he was aware of the philosophical currents of his time.

From his letters and the references in his works it emerges that he knew the representatives of pagan culture and showed a certain deference to them, as can be seen from a letter to Libanius,[24] who had been Basil's teacher. This is an interesting testimony to the fact that Gregory did not have illustrious masters, but depended, for his literary education, on the mediation of his brother. There is no information about Gregory being educated other than at Cappadocia, unlike Basil, but it is possible that he had access to his father's sources when he took up the same career as a rhetorician.

Gregory's education has sometimes been described as due almost exclusively to the women in his family, especially to his paternal grandmother, Macrina,[25] disciple of Gregory Thaumaturgus and an illustrious Christian, who had experienced the persecution of Maximinus Daia, and to his older sister, also named Macrina, who held in the family the role of spiritual guide.[26] It is

certainly undeniable that these exceptional figures played a prominent role in the Christian education of Gregory and his entire family,[27] but this should not be understood in the sense that secular culture was excluded from the education of the children. In fact, Naucratius too, the third son of the family, before devoting himself to rigorous ascetic life, had achieved success as a young amateur practitioner of rhetoric.[28]

It is also likely that the Christian faith of the family, originated from the preaching of Gregory Thaumaturgus, reflected the saint's view on the secular sciences, influenced by the example of Origen. This explains how the rhetorical profession of Basil the Elder could be combined with the Christian tradition of the family, where young members devoted themselves to literary and philosophical studies. This is also the spirit of Basil's famous *Address to Young Men on Greek Literature*, probably dedicated to his nephews, which became the manifesto of a balanced attitude towards pagan literature.

The context in which Gregory was educated, therefore, if on the one hand was characterized by a fervent Christian faith, on the other had a specific interest in Greek culture, and in rhetoric in particular, because it suited the rank of his family, wealthy and influential both in the paternal branch and in the maternal one.[29] If, therefore, the influence of Basil is to be regarded as decisive in the life Gregory, it should not be considered exclusive, neither with regard to his cultural education, which was probably under the influence of Basil the Elder, nor to the choice of the Christian life, which was already traditional in his family. However, it is known that Basil had considerable influence in Gregory's life because, after a period devoted to rhetoric and marriage, he returned to his ecclesiastical career and was placed by his brother as head of the diocese of Nyssa. It is his written output in this role which is extant,[30] with the exception of the *De virginitate*, composed on Basil's commission before Gregory was appointed bishop. Nevertheless, Gregory's education and interest in Greek literature emerges in his works and can be well observed in the letters to some eminent personalities in the culture of his age.

It is not easy to determine when Gregory became interested in philosophy. His knowledge in the specific field of philosophy is wide, but he expicitly mentions only philosophers of the classical and Hellenistic age.[31] When mentioning pagan philosophers, especially in the *Contra Eunomium*, his intent is to confute his opponent by showing that he simply plagiarized the doctrines

of the pagans, who did not know the true notion of God. Only Plato is sometimes cited in a more positive way, although he too is not considered free from the errors of the pagan religion. Gregory never mentions Neoplatonic philosophers. This fact makes a clear study of his sources and influences difficult, and the evaluation of his thought has not been unanimous. Nowadays there are no doubts that Gregory has read Plotinus, but it is not easy to detect which treatises were available to him.[32]

Before highlighting the Plotinian elements present in Gregory, it might be useful to make some conjectures on the fact that he does not mention the Neoplatonic philosophers. A first consideration that can be proposed is that he does not cite any contemporary pagan philosopher, or in any case later than the advent of Christianity. It could also be possible that the motivation for this silence might be due to a sort of *damnatio memoriae* that had struck Porphyry, guilty of writing the infamous *Contra Christianos*, and that this condemnation was extended to the philosopher's master. These are simply conjectures, but the fact that Nemesius in the *De natura hominis*, which is strongly indebted to the work of Gregory,[33] cites the Neoplatonists could be a sign that after a certain period, at the turn of the new century, when the Bishop of Emesa writes, the attitude towards the accuser of the Christians was less bitter.

The lack of explicit mention of Plotinus, however, contrasts with the use that Gregory made of the philosopher's writings, although it is not always possible to find evidence other than a strong similarity. It is therefore a safe approach to detect the presence, in Gregory's writings, of the influence of Neoplatonic doctrines, without determining whether they are due to a direct access to Neoplatonists' writings or to some kind of philosophical compedium.

A special place among the philosophical sources of Gregory is obviously occupied by Philo and Origen, since they constituted the most accomplished examples of interaction between biblical exegesis and philosophical thought. It is clear that Platonism forms the basis of Gregory's doctrines in some crucial concepts, such as the division of reality into sensible and intelligible, the transcendence of the divine and the immateriality of the human soul, and also in the doctrine of man's union with the divine. These are all concepts that were already present in Origen and that the Cappadocians placed in an expressly orthodox system. The elements derived from the Platonic tradition are considered by Gregory as purely functional to the coherence of the Christian

system which he was trying to construct, and therefore he adopts some Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrines, integrating them in a Christian core.[34]

Gregory's attitude to beauty and art seems connected to Plotinus' thought, especially because of *Enn*. I 6: it is this treatise which influenced Gregory's first work, and although later in his life the Plotinian themes seem to be less visible, nevertheless it is possible to detect a specific line connecting the two thinkers.

Elements of Gregory of Nyssa's aesthetic reflection

The homilies of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, where the theme of *eros* brings consequently the reflections on the beautiful that is the object of *eros*, and the earlier *De virginitate*, where the influence of Plotinus is visible, expressly deal with the theme of beauty, derived from the divine one. The specific property of beauty defined by Gregory is to arouse desire. This is the conception which permeates all the homilies on the *Song* and is stated at the beginning of them. Through this prerogative, beauty attracts, prompting the *eros* in the viewer, and this appears to be a general fact, in the sense that it characterizes both divine beauty and beautiful bodies, although Gregory refuses, like Plotinus, to apply to the divine nature the criteria of beauty valid only for bodies, such as the classical concepts of symmetry and proportion.[35] At the same time, however, he believes that there is a reason for applying the same attribute of beautiful to different levels of reality. The solution occurs in defining beauty on the effects it produces: it is only because *eros* is generated in the soul that the presence of beauty can be attested. This is configured by Gregory as the principle according to which an analogy between the divine intelligible beauty and that of all the other bodies can be found. There are some degrees of beauty, which are different according to the different level of beings, either those belonging to the sensible appearance or to the incorporeal and spiritual reality. They are nevertheless all united by the fact that they arouse a desire.

In the case of divine beauty, its specific features are all in opposition to those of materiality. The important consequence, not without its problems as will be observed in Chapter 5, is that if on the one hand beauty can be detected in all cases when the *eros* is aroused, and therefore it is necessary to conceive a fluid

continuity between the various manifestations of beauty, on the other the distinction between real beauty which is incorporeal and one which is merely visible to the senses is qualified as a sharp opposition.

It goes without saying that the presence of Platonism in these conceptions is predominant, both in considering the beautiful as the specific object of *eros*,[36] and in outlining a hierarchy of it.[37] In Gregory's reflections, the semantic polyvalence of the Greek adjective καλός (and its derivatives), following Plato's steps,[38] underlies all the definitions of what is beautiful, closely related to ἀγαθός, so that both in the divine and in the creatures the two terms may be considered most times equivalent, unlike in Plotinus.[39]

Because the erotic motif of the *Song of the Songs* cannot, according to Gregory, be interpreted in a literal way, the sacred text must be read as the revelation of a doctrine (a φιλοσοφία, in Gregory's words) which, starting from the basic teachings of the Book of Proverbs through Ecclesiastes attains its perfection precisely in the *Song of the Songs*. The *Song* is, among the biblical writings, one of the most subject to the allegorical exegesis by the Fathers, who were embarassed by its openly erotic nature, and it was Origen who interpreted for the first time its main characters, the groom and the bride, as Christ and the soul or the Church.[40] In his commentary, Gregory repeats the division between the sensible and intelligible that forms the background of his conception of reality.[41] The beauty described in the *Song*, says Gregory, is the divine one, invisible, immeasurably superior to bodily attractiveness; it cannot be described in its reality but only through images.[42] It is also infinite, and therefore at first the soul who contemplates it thinks that its desire will never be fulfilled, and becomes disheartened, but then realizes that it is the process itself of being satiated which will last forever.[43]

In the early treatise *De virginitate*, too, where the influence of Plotinus is full and visible,[44] the theme of divine beauty is central: this is infinitely superior to the material attractions, which constitute an irreparable loss if considered in themselves. The soul must rise above the vulgar pleasure produced by sensible things to turn to beauty in itself. One does not have to renounce the desire that beauty arouses, although it seems impossible to satisfy it because of its sublimity, but must follow it through self-elevation.[45] These are, it is obvious, concepts, as well as vocabulary, derived from the Platonic tradition, which defines divine beauty for its immateriality, in sharp contrast to material bodies.

The presence of Plotinus and in particular of his first treatise is well evident throughout the Gregorian conception. The fact that a connection can be found between physical beauty and the divine, and that the connection is established by participation in the *eidos*, as well as the need for catharsis and elevation, are all Plotinian themes.[46]

Man, in Gregory's account, is given beauty for participation in divine beauty. Human beauty in fact resides in the soul, created in the image and likeness of God. On this specific theme, two of Gregory's works are focused, the treatise *De opificio hominis* and the dialogue *De anima et resurrectione*, in which his anthropology focuses on the derivation of the properties of the human soul from divine characteristics. The beauty of the inner man, however, has been tarnished by sin, and therefore a process of purification and assimilation to God is needed in order to recover it. There is also a kind of beauty which is specific to other creatures, which is again not related to materiality. In fact, all created beings, for Gregory, are beautiful, regardless of the pleasure that they can produce in us: the large animals and the plants in their variety are beautiful, and everyone can agree on this, but even the beings that appear repulsive to man actually possess beauty, since they correspond to the divine idea[47] which conceived them as such and therefore precisely by doing this has given them beauty. Therefore, all natural beings, not only the rational ones, are beautiful, and such beauty is always of an intelligible nature. Although apparently it seems that repugnant beings cannot arouse *eros*, they are called beautiful without contradiction in terms of the doctrine of *In Canticum* and *De virginitate*, because the beauty that they possess is precisely linked to the divine idea and this is indeed generating *eros* in the soul that is able to contemplate. The natural beauty of a landscape can also be appreciated for the *thauma* it arouses in the soul, as Gregory says in letter 20.[48] From this point of view, therefore, there is no opposition between divine beauty and the beauty of creatures, which derive from the former the reason for their being beautiful.

If all creatures are beautiful, does ugliness exist? It seems from what we have observed so far that Gregory denies that natural objects can be defined as ugly, because they are created according to the pattern that God has established and in which their beauty lies. For this reason, if there is the possibility of being deprived of beauty, this should be only in artificial beings, that is those produced by man. Gregory in fact cannot accept the idea that ugliness is due

to matter,[49] because matter also comes from God and is the result of the combination of pure intelligibles.[50] The issue in this case, however, is complicated, because sometimes in his writings Gregory seems to admit that creatures can also be ugly from the physical point of view, as in the case of *De Virg.* 18 where he mentions a mutilated man, who could not be called beautiful because he was devoid of a part.[51] In this example, moreover, contradiction is added to contradiction, because Gregory resumes the traditional concepts of symmetry and harmony as necessary for sensible beauty, which earlier in the same treatise he had refused, following Plotinus, as meaningless and incoherent words.

The reason for this incoherence is that in Gregory there are often, at the same time, two different levels, one philosophical reflection and the other rhetorical expression, for which reason he does not shy away from introducing examples drawn from common experience. The result is that sometimes he reintroduces in plain language what he has rejected at a theoretical level. It is therefore important to distinguish the two planes and not expect total doctrinal consistency in the case of passages where the rhetorical aspect is predominant. Although, as a criterion, this may seem in many ways unsatisfactory, it is also true that it adheres to the way Gregory composed his writings, which are not usually treatises specifically dedicated to a philosophical problem, but have various pastoral purposes in which, with a preeminence of the rhetorical level, philosophical considerations are often included.

The reflection on the possibility of ugliness does not stop at this level, but must be brought back to its own dimension, in the sense of opposition to beauty: if this is primarily of intelligible nature, and only secondarily and in a derived manner concerns the body, the same must be said of its opposite. The question must therefore be better placed, because there is a distinction between incorporeal creatures, that is angelic entities, and bodily creatures, with man, μεθόριος, intermediate, between them. If in the case of bodily creatures it is possible to exclude the presence of ugliness, for the angelic beings it must be said that they are given, in a pure way, the same participation in divine beauty that lies in man. The problem arises with regard to the fallen angels: is there beauty or ugliness in them? As creatures they should possess beauty, as all the others, but since they no longer correspond to the divine idea because of their disobedience, they have lost their beauty in the present condition.[52] In this case

it must be assumed that there is an ugliness as correspondent to the departure from the good. The possibility of ugliness therefore exists, and it can be found in the fallen angels and in human souls when they obfuscate their likeness to God. It is therefore in the ethical level that the risk of ugliness lies, as a departure from original beauty. In this Gregory is, again, in consonance with Plotinus, who regards the love for bodily beauty as the origin of the ugliness of the soul.[53]

It is now possible to talk about the beauty (and, by contrast, the ugliness) of artificial beings, and in particular of works of art, which might require a different approach. Gregory of Nyssa unfortunately does not theorize specifically which is the source of beauty of works of art, and he probably shares the devaluation of the mimetic arts made by Plato, since they remain within the material level and cannot participate in intelligible beauty. Gregory, however, is not averse to giving many indications about the fine arts and shows a specific interest in all sorts of human activities, as exemplified by the display of his knowledge of medicine in the final chapters of the *De opificio hominis*. He often cites the act of painting,[54] that of sculpting,[55] evidently derived, in its application to the human soul, from Plotinus; he knows the difficulty of glyptics and in letter 25 to Amphilochius he describes the plan of a church[56] and defines architectural beauty, based on mathematical relations and of a different nature from the beauty perceived sensorially. It should be stressed that Gregory was in close relations with the court of Constantinople, whose aesthetic preferences he knew, and probably also appreciated the works of art that were circulating in it. In fact, even in his silence on the value of the arts,[57] the familiarity he shows with artistic processes seems to attest to an appreciation somehow independent from theoretical evaluation, in a similar way to what we observed before in relation to bodily ugliness.

The objects of art, therefore, although lacking a specific status within Gregory's philosophical reflection on beauty, are recognized as aesthetically pleasing in contexts where the theoretical evaluation gives way to rhetorical expression.

3

Sculpting and Painting Between Metaphor and Didacticism

A metaphor of sculpting in Plotinus

In this chapter I will focus on two different ways of incorporating sculpting and painting into the philosophical discourse. Plotinus' metaphor of the act of sculpting will be seen in its philosophical and rhetorical use and its reprise by Gregory of Nyssa. The didactic value of painting, as indentified by the Cappadocian Fathers, will then be considered, while an appendix to this chapter will be devoted to enquiry about the use of a metaphor of sculpting during the Renaissance in Michelangelo's sonnet 151.

It is well known that the treatise *On the Beautiful* is one of the most admired writings of Plotinus,[1] and the historical reasons for such appreciation are notorious. From Basil of Caesarea to Gregory of Nyssa to Augustine, the Christian thinkers appropriated the words of the Neoplatonic philosopher, and transmitted them throughout the Middle Ages.[2] In Plotinus' treatise, attention to the beauty of the spiritual world and the exhortation to make it shine in each person's interiority expressed a philosophical content on which Christians drew. It is unusual for the first work of an author to have such wide fortune. However, although Porphyry says that the treatise is Plotinus' first work, we know that the philosopher was already in his maturity,[3] which may explain the coherence and depth of the treatise.

The influence of the treatise was not limited only to late antiquity, as it extended with different emphasis throughout the history of western culture. From the Renaissance onwards, there was a rediscovery of and a reflection on the concept of beauty expressed both in *Enn.* I 6 and in *Enn.* V 8. Indeed Plotinus' role in western aesthetics has certainly had special attention,[4] in spite of the fact that, in some ways, what we could define properly as an aesthetic

reflection in Plotinus does not seem to occupy a prominent place within his system.

We will focus on a specific passage that could be considered as a model for the variety of Plotinus' influence in European culture. If this passage is not a focal point of the treatise, nevertheless it constitutes an example, worthy of interest, of the rhetorical as well as the philosophical appeal of the treatise. In the ninth chapter of the treatise Plotinus says:

> Πῶς ἂν οὖν ἴδοις ψυχὴν ἀγαθὴν οἷον τὸ κάλλος ἔχει; Ἄναγε ἐπὶ σαυτὸν καὶ ἴδε· κἂν μήπω σαυτὸν ἴδῃς καλόν, οἷα ποιητὴς ἀγάλματος, ὃ δεῖ καλὸν γενέσθαι, τὸ μὲν ἀφαιρεῖ, τὸ δὲ ἀπέξεσε, τὸ δὲ λεῖον, τὸ δὲ καθαρὸν ἐποίησεν, ἕως ἔδειξε καλὸν ἐπὶ τῷ ἀγάλματι πρόσωπον, οὕτω καὶ σὺ ἀφαίρει ὅσα περιττὰ καὶ ἀπεύθυνε ὅσα σκολιά, ὅσα σκοτεινὰ καθαίρων ἐργάζου εἶναι λαμπρὰ καὶ μὴ παύσῃ τεκταίνων τὸ σὸν ἄγαλμα, ἕως ἂν ἐκλάμψειέ σοι τῆς ἀρετῆς ἡ θεοειδὴς ἀγλαία, ἕως ἂν ἴδῃς σωφροσύνην ἐν ἁγνῷ βεβῶσαν βάθρῳ.
>
> How then can you see the sort of beauty a good soul has? Go back into yourself and look; and if you do not see yourself beautiful, then just as someone making a statue which has to be beautiful cuts away here and polishes there and makes one part smooth and clears another till he has given his statue a beautiful face, so you too must cut away excess and straighten the crooked and clear the dark and make it bright, and never stop 'working on your statue' till the divine glory of virtue shines out on you, till you see 'self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat.'[5]

It should be noted, first of all, that the passage is presented as an amplification, if not an exegesis, of a Platonic suggestion, as the statue with its pedestal is a reference to the *Phaedrus*.[6] The meaning of Plotinus' words, however, does not follow Plato but appears to be independent. Anne-Lise Darras-Worms identifies the specific nature of the passage together with its differences from Plato – not so much from the *Phaedrus* as from the *Symposium* and the *Republic*: in Plotinus the statue which is carved represents our own self, and consequently there is not, as in the Platonic text, a reference to something else in which to discover and revere beauty itself. We can see instead a *mouvement autoréflexiv*.[7] Plotinus' vision thus clearly differs both from that of the *Symposium* (which identifies the different degrees of beauty to be captured

always in something external) and from the dialectic ascent towards the good as illustrated in the *Republic*.[8]

The distance from Plato lies in the identification of the object that leads to beauty itself: while such an object is external in Plato, it is inner in Plotinus. One can see here a confirmation of the Plotinian attitude to prudery that informs others of his writings and is visible in the specifications and limitations of the treatise *On eros*,[9] as an evident correction of the Platonic attitude to homoerotic love. True beauty is interior because it is within the self that the soul can go back to the first principles and see beauty itself. If it can certainly be said that the treatise *On the Beautiful*, from this point of view, outlines a search for personal identity,[10] it is also true that this search for the self in Plotinus always results as an exit from the self, an ecstasy, indeed, in order to become reunited with the divine, in a way that appears more radical than in Plato.

The characteristic of the Plotinian use of this metaphor is not merely in relation to an action taken in order to achieve the form, which is the same as in the metaphor of the act of painting, and generally in every reference to productive activity. More specifically, Plotinus adopts the metaphor of the act of sculpting because it illustrates the meaning of the purifying activity of the soul in a manner which is different from other artistic activities. Through the metaphor Plotinus conveys that it is necessary that the soul applies itself, first, to make a sketch and, then, according to the progress of the degree of virtue, to depict ever more perfectly the form of beauty which lies within. The attention to the different steps of the sculpting technique[11] characterizes the specific function of this metaphor,[12] the validity of which is expressed through all the stages of the sculpting process. Significant in this regard is the fact that Plotinus identifies in each of these stages or variants of sculptural activity a reference to the catharsis that the soul must achieve. He thus goes from the basic meaning of the metaphor, which is the elimination of the superfluous, to the adjustment of those parts which are not yet fully proportionate, up to what, in the sculpting process, could be classified as the last rifiniture, which is the removal of each matte element from the surface of the marble.[13] The overall meaning of the metaphor (with reference to the text of the *Phaedrus*) is that, like a sculptor who strives to further his work, each individual must not abandon the cathartic activity until the perfect beauty of virtue resides in the soul.

We can therefore identify three specific elements of the reference to sculpting: the first one, in itself intrinsic as the term which the metaphor is aimed at more directly, is the connection between the elimination of the superfluous in order to unveil the form, and the cathartic activity; then the auto-reflexive movement (identified by Darras-Worms); and finally the expression of an ongoing action to be considered accomplished only at the achievement of a quite distant goal. None of these three aspects seem to be found in the context of Plato's *Phaedrus* which Plotinus alludes to.

The metaphor depicts in this case a process and therefore is, as many of the Plotinian metaphors, dynamic. It is not the statue as the finished product that is the nodal element, but the procedure itself, leading to the definition of the form.

The sculpting of one's own statue therefore represents a cathartic activity of the soul aimed at eliminating what is not aligned to the soul's form, in order to allow the revelation of its true nature.[14] In this context it must also be noted that in *Enn*. IV 7 (2) 10, 47 Plotinus uses a somewhat similar metaphor, when he says that the soul has to remove its redundant layers in order to reveal the temperance and justice which lie within it, like statues that are covered with an accumulation of the soot of time. In this other metaphor (whose resemblance to the sculpting one is more significant in that the two treatises belong to the first phase of his work), the activity described by Plotinus is closer to that of a restorer, who frees from the debris of time what originally was perfect, while in *Enn*. I 6 the emphasis seems to be set on achieving a form still not entirely complete. It is clear, however, that conceptually for Plotinus this is the same operation, and the use in both cases of the metaphor of the statue, to be carved or restored, is an effective rhetorical tool to convey the necessity of the cathartic activity of the soul. The virtues, which the soul already possesses, only have to be released from the superfluous, as in the first metaphor, or cleaned from sediments, as in the second one.

A metaphor of sculpting in Gregory of Nyssa

It seems that the ascetic and cathartic feature pervading *Enn.* I 6 (which, we shall repeat, has enabled it to become one of the most read and celebrated of

Plotinus' treatises) reaches a vivid acme in the metaphor of sculpting, significantly placed almost at the end of the treatise and rhetorically organized in a perhaps more diligent way than other texts by Plotinus. The exhortation to the purification of the soul through the elimination of the redundant elements which obscure its beauty – like the sculptor who releases a form from the inert matter of the block of marble – takes therefore a central position in Plotinus' early paraenesis.

The Plotinian metaphor of the act of sculpting appears to have been a source of inspiration for Gregory of Nyssa in the fourteenth homily on the *Song of Songs*. Commenting on verses 5, 14 of the *Song*: Χεῖρες αὐτοῦ τορευταί, χρυσαῖ, πεπληρωμέναι θαρσεῖς, Gregory writes:

> Καθάπερ γὰρ οἱ πρός τινα ζῴου μορφὴν ἀποτυποῦντες τὸ μάρμαρον ἐκεῖνα διὰ τῆς τορείας ἐκγλύφουσι τοῦ λίθου καὶ ἐκκολάπτουσιν ὧν περιαιρεθέντων πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον εἶδος ἀποτυποῦται τὸ μίμημα, οὕτω καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ κάλλους τῶν τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας χειρῶν πολλὰ χρὴ διὰ τῆς τῶν λογισμῶν τορείας ἀποξυσθῆναι, ἵνα γένηται ἡ χεὶρ χρυσῆ ὡς ἀληθῶς καὶ ἀκήρατος.
>
> For just as those who inscribe the form of some living being into marble dig out and remove from the stone, by a process of scuplting, those bits by whose removal the image is conformed to the appearance of its original, so too, where it is a question of the beauty of the hands that belong to the body of the church, there is a great deal that must be scraped off by the sculpting work of thoughts, so that the hand may become truly golden and untarnished.[15]

It is generally recognized – and Langerbeck's critical edition certifies it *in apparatu* – that Gregory's source here is precisely the passage from the *Enn.* I 6, 9. The same image of the sculptural process is used in the context of the exhortation to catharsis, although the differences are marked because Gregory does not adopt the same auto-reflexive perspective present in Plotinus. Gregory, in fact, integrates biblical exegesis and philosophical teaching, so that in the context of the references to the body of Christ, the insertion of the metaphor derived from Plotinus reveals the attitude of assimilation and transformation of pagan culture, typical of Basil, his brother Gregory and their circle.

Elsewhere too Gregory ehoes metaphors related to the process of artistic production to express how, in the soul, the divine image can be reproduced. For example, at the conclusion of the treatise *On the constitution of man*, he adopts the same description of the sculpting process, although in this case not in connection with purification, but with the relation of the soul to the body. Even in this case an influence of Plotinus can be detected, although it is related more to what is expressed in *Enn*. V 8 about the idea of the artist working on matter by giving it a shape.[16] Gregory, however, fails to understand entirely the Plotinian concept, as here he refers to the mere mimetic process. His interest in artistic activities is also clear from the use he makes of images linked to painting, such as again in *De opificio hominis*[17] or in the same homilies in *In Canticum*.[18]

The Plotinian theme of sculpting one's own soul is again briefly reprised in the treatise *On the Life of Moses*, where the events narrated in Exodus are reinterpreted allegorically. Here[19] Gregory describes the death of Moses as an accomplishment of his spiritual life and not an end, in the same way that a sculptor, giving the finishing touch to a statue, confers to his work its highest excellence. The different variations of Plotinus' metaphor in Gregory of Nyssa testify the impact that *Enn.* I 6 had on the Cappadocian Father and the appeal of the metaphor of the energetic activity of the sculptor applied to the work of the soul.

Justification of the didactic use of painting

Painting, as opposed to sculpture, seems to have presented different issues during antiquity and in the Middle Ages. On the one hand, Plato's view of artistic mimesis leads to a deeper condemnation of painting in that it adopts perspective and illusion as the main instruments to imitate nature. The painted image defies reality on many levels, because not only can it not reproduce objects as they are, but it also misleads vision in pretending that a surface is a three-dimensional volume.[20]

The same reason for the dismissal of painting is, on the other hand, the reason for its appraisal in later ages, especially under the Byzantine empire and in the western Middle Ages. First of all, sculpture was perceived as directly

connected to pagan ritual and it is clear that it was not favoured in Christian churches or at least it was used only for the decoration of specific elements like sarcophagi, altars and thrones. Painting instead acquired a specific status, especially in the production of icons, for its narrative efficacy and indeed for its bi-dimensionality, which on the one hand was visually preferred in late antiquity, but was also less likely to represent a threat to the spiritual adoration of the divine.

The development of formulas for the depiction of specific mysteries of faith or the illustration of biblical subjects aimed to standardize in liturgical terms the use of images. In being charged with symbolic elements the painted surfaces became much less a visual illusion than a decoration with a spiritual purpose.

The battle of iconoclasm dealt with the very possibility of producing any art at all, and the theological justification for the use of images adopted some concepts from ancient philosophy in a surprising and challenging way. This cultural phenomenon, however, belongs to a later phase of Byzantine civilization. What I will focus on here instead is a successful concept developed by the Cappadocian Fathers for the use of painting in a sacred context. This gives shape to a long tradition which is perceived as specifically medieval but in fact was developed earlier in late antiquity.

In a dense essay entitled 'Ut scriptura pictura',[21] Jean Pépin devoted his attention to the reconstruction of a specific feature of the medieval vision about art – that is, the parallel between written description and pictorial depiction, the latter intended as an instrument to teach the truths of faith to illiterates. Within the history of aesthetics, a peculiar justification of the educational value of art, especially painting, is given by the Cappadocians because of the direct communication that painting operates in the absence of words. This is not strictly related to Horace's notorious analogy between writing and painting, *ut pictura poesis*,[22] which is aimed at justifying the value of the poetic work as a whole, regardless of its occasional flaws.[23]

Pépin had focused more generally on the issue of the parallelism between painting and writing in the medieval reflection on art, a topic that in the Latin speaking areas seems to appear with Gregory the Great, in two letters to Serenus of Marseilles[24] and in one to Secundinus,[25] the latter perhaps not entirely authentic. Here the concept of *ut scriptura pictura* is already displayed: the

representation through images accomplishes the same task of writing in bringing to memory the history of salvation, with a difference of destination, as the writing is addressed to the educated, while painting replaces it for the illiterate. In reconstructing the history of this doctrine, Pépin also cites Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, who, however, introduced a theory that is not entirely analogous, because they state that painting does have a didactic function, but not only for the uneducated, and they focus instead on its silent and immediate character. In the western context, apart from high interest in a document of a poem by Paulinus of Nola, describing the novelty of the rich pictorial decoration of a church,[26] it is after Gregory the Great that the evaluation of painting, especially because of the struggles connected to the iconoclastic controversy, finds in its educational function one of the reasons for the justification of pictures in churches. Surprisingly, the very same Gregorian texts are notoriously cited both by the author the *Libri Carolini* – who follows the directives of Charlemagne and his entourage, and is particularly hostile to the oriental cult of the images that the Empress Irene and her son Constantine VI supported in Byzantium – and in the letter of Pope Adrian I to Charlemagne, in which he reaffirmed the validity of the Second Council of Nicaea against the hostile position of the emperor. The presence of the same quotation from Gregory the Great, although in authors of opposite positions, certifies the authority of Gregory's solution to the problem of images, which is also confirmed by authors of later centuries, from Ivo of Chartres to the editor of the *Decretum Gratiani*.

Pépin's thesis is that the equivalence between writing and painting, and the educational role of the latter for the uneducated, might have an older root, to be identified in a pagan and specifically Neoplatonic sphere. Quoting a passage of Theodoret of Cyrus about the danger of statues of pagan deities, depicted by artists trained by the devil in order to display the contents of mythological writings, Pépin believes that the source of this combination of painting and writing could be a text by Porphyry, namely a fragment of the Περί ἀγαλμάτων reported by Eusebius,[27] where Theodoret could have read it, reworking it from a point of view which is obviously hostile to paganism.

Porphyry is the first, in Pépin's reconstruction, to interpret sacred images as similar to theological writings, although the philosopher believes that they can be useful only to those who are initiated to the mysteries. Those who are uninitiated, in fact, can capture only their material aspect, in the same way that

the uneducated can consider, in the objects covered with writing (inscriptions, tablets and papyri) only the matter they are made of. Porphyry therefore in this text identifies the analogy between image and writing, giving also a corollary reflection on the complex relationship between knowledge and ignorance. What Pépin proposes is to consider Porphyry, through the mediation of Eusebius and Theodoret, at the base of a concept that had a strong heritage in medieval reflection.[28]

Basil and Gregory of Nyssa on the silent voice of painting

From the texts of Basil and Gregory of Nyssa it is possible to state that their position is independent from all the authors mentioned so far, since for them the educational value of painting is not so much in that it is addressed to the uneducated as a replacement for writing, but because it has an independent function in terms of the silent and immediate communication which it operates. It does not seem that Gregory of Nazianzus had a similar view on painting, but he certainly shows interest in art in general and in colours in decoration in particular.[29]

The first text we will focus on is by Basil of Caesarea, *In martyres Sebastenses II*: because it constitues an important justification of the use of paintings, we can look at the passage in its broader context. These words, moreover, have been often repeated in the iconoclastic controversy:

> Δεῦρο δὴ οὖν, εἰς μέσον αὐτοὺς ἀγαγόντες διὰ τῆς ὑπομνήσεως, κοινὴν τὴν ἀπ᾽ αὐτῶν ὠφέλειαν τοῖς παροῦσι καταστησώμεθα, προδείξαντες πᾶσιν, ὥσπερ ἐν γραφῇ, τὰς τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἀριστείας. Ἐπεὶ καὶ πολέμων ἀνδραγαθήματα καὶ λογογράφοι πολλάκις, καὶ ζωγράφοι διασημαίνουσιν, οἱ μὲν τῷ λόγῳ διακοσμοῦντες, οἱ δὲ τοῖς πίναξιν ἐγχαράττοντες, καὶ πολλοὺς ἐπήγειραν πρὸς ἀνδρίαν ἑκάτεροι. Ἃ γὰρ ὁ λόγος τῆς ἱστορίας διὰ τῆς ἀκοῆς παρίστησι, ταῦτα γραφικὴ σιωπῶσα διὰ μιμήσεως δείκνυσιν. Οὕτω δὴ καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀναμνήσωμεν τῆς ἀρετῆς τῶν ἀνδρῶν τοὺς παρόντας, καὶ οἱονεὶ ὑπ᾽ὄψιν αὐτῶν ἀγαγόντες τὰς πράξεις, κινήσωμεν πρὸς τὴν μίμησιν τοὺς γενναιοτέρους καὶ οἰκειοτέρους αὐτοῖς τὴν προαίρεσιν.
>
> Come then, let us bring them [referring to the martyrs who are being celebrated] into prominence by remembering them, let us present to those

> who are here the common benefit deriving from them, demonstrating to everyone, as if it were in writing, the acts of the men's prowess. When often both historians and painters express manly deeds of war, the one embellishing them with words, the other engraving them onto tablets, they both arouse many too to bravery. The facts which the historical account presents by being listened to, the painting silently portrays by imitation. In this very way let us too remind those present of the men's virtue, and as it were by bringing their deeds to their gaze, let us motivate them to imitate those who are nobler and closer to them with respect to their course of life.[30]

I will not dwell much on the importance that these words had for the controversy over the use of images (John Damascene will quote them as an example of the previous Fathers' accounts about the veneration of the icons), but rather on the internal reasons for Basil's reflection. The first aspect that emerges is the parenetic one, in that the celebration of the martyrs is intended as an opportunity for the exhortation to virtue.[31] In this context Basil's connection with Greek culture stands out, because he does not make a distinction, according to what emerges from the text, between pagan and Christian tradition, stating the equivalence between painting and rhetoric. Both have, or may have, the same object, history, told and expressed through different resources. Rhetoric narrates by means of words, while painting tells and describes by means of images, and does so in silence. In defining painting as γραφικὴ σιωπῶσα Basil certainly uses a rhetorical device to contrast two different modes of expression but, as a result of silence, the onlookers gain an understanding that is immediate and universal, and therefore intended for a wider audience than that of rhetoric. Silent painting seems to have a broader parenetic and pedagogical value than discourse expressed in words. It should be also remarked, following Pépin, that the term γραφική itself could present some ambiguities, particularly in the context of his study, as it can mean both writing and painting, but in Basil's text it is clear that it refers to the latter.

We can now move on to a second passage, taken from Gregory of Nyssa's *De Sancto Theodoro*. The oration[32] provides information on the architecture and visual arts, as well as the cult,[33] of the time, and therefore constitutes an important source for Christian archaeology, like the notorious letter 25 to

Amphilochius,[34] in which Gregory elaborates a sort of aesthetics of architecture, derived from the application of mathematical proportions.

In *De Sancto Theodoro*, immediately after describing the intent of his oration, in a very similar manner to his brother Basil in his oration on the martyrs of Sebaste, Gregory says:

> Ἐλθὼν δὲ εἴς τι χωρίον ὅμοιον τούτῳ, ἔνθα σήμερον ὁ ἡμέτερος σύλλογος, ὅπου μνήμη δικαίου καὶ ἅγιον λείψανον· πρῶτον μὲν τῇ μεγαλοπρεπείᾳ τῶν ὁρωμένων ψυχαγωγεῖται, οἶκον βλέπων ὡς Θεοῦ ναὸν, ἐξησκημένον λαμπρῶς τῷ μεγέθει τῆς οἰκοδομῆς, καὶ τῷ τῆς ἐπικοσμήσεως κάλλει, ἔνθα καὶ τέκτων εἰς ζώων φαντασίαν τὸ ξύλον ἐμόρφωσε, καὶ λιθοξόος εἰς ἀργύρου λειότητα τὰς πλάκας ἀπέξεσεν. Ἐπέχρωσε δὲ καὶ ζωγράφος τὰ ἄνθη τῆς τέχνης ἐν εἰκόνι διαγραψάμενος, τὰς ἀριστείας τοῦ μάρτυρος, τὰς ἐνστάσεις, τὰς ἀλγηδόνας, τὰς θηριώδεις τῶν τυράννων μορφὰς, τὰς ἐπηρείας, τὴν φλογοτρόφον ἐκείνην κάμινον, τὴν μακαριωτάτην τελείωσιν τοῦ ἀθλητοῦ, τοῦ ἀγωνοθέτου Χριστοῦ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης μορφῆς τὸ ἐκτύπωμα, πάντα ἡμῶν ὡς ἐν βιβλίῳ τινὶ γλωττοφόρῳ διὰ χρωμάτων τεχνουργησάμενος, σαφῶς διηγόρευσε τοὺς ἀγῶνας τοῦ μάρτυρος, καὶ ὡς λειμῶνα λαμπρὸν τὸν νεὼν κατηγλάϊσεν· οἶδε γὰρ καὶ γραφὴ σιωπῶσα ἐν τοίχῳ λαλεῖν, καὶ τὰ μέγιστα ὠφελεῖν· καὶ ὁ τῶν ψηφίδων συνθέτης, ἱστορίας ἄξιον ἐποίησε τὸ πατούμενον ἔδαφος. Καὶ τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς οὕτω φιλοτεχνήμασιν ἐνευπα θήσας τὴν ὄψιν, ἐπιθυμεῖ λοιπὸν καὶ αὐτῇ πλησιάσαι τῇ θήκῃ· ἁγιασμὸν καὶ εὐλογίαν τὴν ἐπαφὴν εἶναι πιστεύων. Εἰ δὲ καὶ κόνιν τις δοίη φέρειν τὴν ἐπικειμένην τῇ ἐπιφανείᾳ τῆς ἀναπαύσεως, δῶρον ὁ χοῦς λαμβάνεται, καὶ ὡς κειμήλιον ἡ γῆ θησαυρίζεται. Τὸ γὰρ αὐτοῦ τοῦ λειψάνου προσάψασθαι, εἴ ποτέ τις ἐπιτυχία τοιαύτη παράσχοι τὴν ἐξουσίαν, ὅπως ἐστὶ πολυπόθητον, καὶ εὐχῆς τῆς ἀνωτάτω τὸ δῶρον, ἴσασιν οἱ πεπειραμένοι, καὶ τῆς τοιαύτης ἐπιθυμίας ἐμφορηθέντες. Ὡς σῶμα γὰρ αὐτὸ ζῶν καὶ ἀνθοῦν οἱ βλέποντες κατασπάζονται, τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς, τῷ στόματι, ταῖς ἀκοαῖς, πάσαις προςάγοντες ταῖς αἰσθήσεσιν, εἶτα τὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας καὶ τὸ τοῦ πάθους ἐπιχέοντες δάκρυον, ὡς ὁλοκλήρῳ καὶ φαινομένῳ τῷ μάρτυρι τὴν τοῦ πρεσβεύειν ἱκεσίαν προσάγουσιν, ὡς δορυφόρον τοῦ Θεοῦ παρακαλοῦντες, ὡς λαμβάνοντα τὰς δωρεὰς ὅταν ἐθέλῃ ἐπικαλούμενοι.
>
> But somebody coming to a place like this one, where we are gathered today, where the memory of the just is kept alive and his holy remains preserved, is in the first place attracted by the magnificence of what they see. They see a house that, like a temple of God, is splendidly adorned by the size of the building and the beauty of the ornamentation. The carpenter shaped the wood

> until it had the form of animals and the mason[35] polished the stones until they had the smoothness of silver. The painter coloured the blooms of his art, having depicted on an image the martyr's brave deeds, his opposition, his continuous pain, the beastly appearance of the tyrants, the insults, the blazing furnace that was the athlete's most blessed end, the representation of the human form of Christ, who was the president of the games – having fashioned all these things for us by his use of colours, he portrayed, as if in a book that uttered speech, in great detail the martyr's contest and at the same time he also adorned the church as a beautiful meadow. For even though it remains silent, painting can speak on the wall and be of the greatest profit. And the mosaicist, for his part, made a floor to tread on that was worthy of the martyr's story.
>
> Taking delight in the seeing of such works that can be observed, one longs for the rest, in particular to approach the tomb, trusting that touching it results in sanctification and blessing. And if somebody gives permission to take away the dust that lies upon the surface of the resting place, then the soil is taken away as a gift and the earth is preserved as a treasure. But to touch the relics themselves, as chance on occasion provides the opportunity, that is much-desired and the gift for prayers to the Most High, as is known to those who have had this experience and have fulfilled this kind of longing. For as if it is the same body, still alive and flourishing, those beholding it embrace it with the eyes, the mouth, the ears. And when they have approached it with all the senses, they pour tears out over it from piety and emotion. And as if he was intact and appearing, they address to the martyr a plea that he would intercede on their behalf, in a way as if they were asking God's bodyguard for a favour and he, called upon, receives presents and provides them whenever he likes.[36]

The passage has been fully quoted because it sheds light on more than one aspect of the problem of aesthetics in late antiquity. We have already mentioned the historical importance of such a description, which provides us with much information on the cult of the martyrs and their relics in the second half of the fourth century and, closely associated with this, on certain aspects of the religious art of the time. The text is also a significant example of Gregory's rhetorical style, which is notoriously contrived and generally dependent on the canons of the Second Sophistic. It is not, however, without effect, in particular in describing the experience, which one is tempted to associate with pagan mystery rites, of the vision and the contact with the body of the martyr, resulting in emotional upset.

All these elements illuminate the concept of the eloquence of silence, in a communication that is not by means of the spoken word, but indeed through a silence that activates emotionally all the senses. It is Gregory himself, in fact, who refers several times to the involvement of all sensations (τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς οὕτω φιλοτεχνήμασιν ἐνευπαθήσας τὴν ὄψιν, ἐπιθυμεῖ λοιπὸν […] τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς, τῷ στόματι, ταῖς ἀκοαῖς, πάσαις προςάγοντες ταῖς αἰσθήσεσιν) which can be experienced at the martyr's shrine.

In this sense, the visit to the tomb of the saint is configured precisely as an experience that, if we could consider it from a purely aesthetic point of view, one might associate (if this comparison may be allowed)[37] to a contemporary artistic performance or an art installation. The insistence on the emotional impact and the use of some gory elements, such as the description of the martyrdom and the horror of the furnace, together with the repeated juxtaposition between corruptibility and incorruptibility are similar to some current trends of the art scene today. If such a comparison cannot be accepted, one may perhaps embrace, within the same Christian tradition, at least the suggestion of a contiguity with certain aspects of Baroque aesthetics. All this, however, takes us away from the focus of our discussion, which is on the role of painting as illustration of the content of faith through a narrative which is silent and for this reason effective.

Painting, although silently, for Gregory as for Basil, is able to speak – that is, to transmit knowledge and therefore to bring great benefit. It seems clear that in this passage Gregory indulges in the paradox of a communication that takes place without words. We should not forget that if to our contemporary culture, accustomed to the predominant role of non-verbal communication, this does not seem surprising, from the Greek perspective, within which Gregory consciously places himself, σιωπή and λόγος belong to distant semantic areas, if not opposed ones. Basil's intuition about painting is therefore expanded by Gregory, not without the rhetorical self-consciousness that sometimes can be observed in him, in a more general reflection on the effectiveness of communication through silence.

It should be mentioned that the theme of silence is bound to that of martyrdom also in the first encomium *On the Forty Martyrs*. Here Gregory interprets the words of Psalm 18, 4 in the *Septuagint* translation (οὐκ εἰσὶν λαλιαὶ οὐδὲ λόγοι: 'There is no speech, nor are there words'), applying them to the testimony of the martyrs who, even if they are silent, with their martyrdom

perform an exhortation more vigorous then any speech.[38] Here too, silent communication presents the same emotional and learning character that we have identified in relation to painting.[39]

The last text that I would like to briefly mention, again following Pépin's steps,[40] is by John of Damascus, who derived from the Cappadocians the same concept of painting as a vehicle for knowledge not by means of words; John's reprise indicates that the Cappadocians' reflection on the value of the figurative image became influential in the eastern Church. The context of John's text is, in fact, devoted to a reflection on the legitimacy and the role of sacred art. In the *De imaginibus*, in a section where he quotes several passages from the Fathers concerning the value of sacred images, the Damascene writes that βίβλοι τοῖς ἀγραμμάτοις εἰσὶν αἱ εἰκόνες καὶ τῆς τῶν ἁγίων τιμῆς ἀσίγητοι κήρυκες ἐν ἀήχῳ φωνῇ τοὺς ὁρῶντας διδάσκουσαι καὶ τὴν ὅρασιν ἁγιάζουσαι: 'images are books for the illiterate and silent heralds of the glory of the saints; with a silent voice, they teach to those who look at them and make the vision holy'.[41]

The monk from Damascus, who writes these words commenting on the passage by Basil quoted before, at a time when the debate about the legitimacy of images both in the East and in the West had become more heated, on the one hand attests the concept of the equivalence between image and writing whose origin Pépin proposed to identify in Porphyry, and on the other repeats the paradox, used by Basil and later re-elaborated by his brother Gregory, of the silent communication operated by painting with a didactic scope. He probably appreciated the Cappadocians' oxymoron and wanted to highlight its finesse and elegance.

Basil's and Gregory of Nyssa's intuition, therefore, had the merit of finding a wording that, within a rhetorical framework, expresses the awareness of the value of visual arts and especially painting, a value based on the didactic power of silence.

An appendix on an unresolved issue: Michelangelo, the metaphor of sculpting and Plotinus

Alongside these notes on the use of the metaphor of sculptural activity in Plotinus and its application in Gregory of Nyssa, I would like to raise the

question as to whether it is possible to identify a derivation from Plotinus in Michelangelo.

The artist, in fact, at the beginning of one of his most famous sonnets, adopts an image which appears to be similar to Plotinus' metaphor:

> Not even the best of artists has any conception
> that a single marble block does not contain
> within its excess, and *that* is only attained
> by the hand that obeys the intellect.[42]

Since these verses constitute the manifesto of Michelangelo's aesthetics, inspired by the Neoplatonic revival of his time, it is worth investigating if it is possible to deduce that Michelangelo reused Plotinus' metaphor. I should first clarify that in order to understand the so-called Neoplatonism in Michelangelo it must be taken into account that he could not read Marsilio Ficino's Latin writings nor his translation of the *Enneads*. The Neoplatonic doctrines Michelangelo could have known came only from the direct reading of Petrarch and Petrarchists (and thus from a purely literary Neoplatonism) and from the mediation, through the educated circles in Florence and Rome, of the properly Ficinian Neoplatonism, which he learned only indirectly,[43] except for Francesco Cattani da Diacceto's Italian version of the *Panegyricus in amorem*, an introduction to the Neoplatonic conception of love embraced by Michelangelo.[44] When Neoplatonism in Michelangelo is discussed, therefore, the mediate character of his knowledge of philosophical thought must always be considered.

However, a plausible explanation of the similarity between the two metaphors, against the sceptical position that severs every link between the two, is that Michelangelo, possibly at a juvenile stage in Florence, could have learnt that Plotinus had used a metaphor of sculpture which stressed the act of liberation of the form from the superfluous which covers it. This conjecture cannot be proved, but it is not to be discarded: in the flow of ideas between artists and men of letters, in fact, the possibility that the more educated disclosed some classic sources to those who did not have access to them cannot be excluded. Given this, we should try to study the way Michelangelo adopted this metaphor and to consider whether, from internal elements, it could be possible to deduce a knowledge of Plotinus' words.

Panofsky had already tried to verify whether in the words of the sonnet a properly Neoplatonic inspiration could be identified, but he found only Michelangelo's use of generic Platonic and Aristotelian themes.[45] According to what we read in Varchi's comment on the sonnet, Michelangelo refers, in fact, to the Aristotelian concept of form that can be observed in *Met.* Z 1033a, while no mention is made of the Plotinian notion of the intelligible form in the thought of the artist, nor of a recovery of a theme from the Neoplatonic philosopher. Varchi recalls also Averroes and John Philoponus to supplement the illustration of the Aristotelian concept, which according to him (and apparently also to Michelangelo, who thanked Varchi for the honour accorded to him by the scholar, therefore endorsing this interpretation) was sufficient to fully explain the metaphor adopted by the artist in his sonnet.[46]

It should be acknowledged that this argument *e silentio*, though noteworthy, cannot give an effective answer to the main question. Indeed it can be observed that Varchi's prose (as often happens in attempts to explain in a philosophical way the concepts expressed in poetic forms) seems to respond to a pedantic taste that smothers the poetic content and seems unable to grasp its spirit.[47] It cannot be underestimated, however, that the attribution of a generic Neoplatonism to Michelangelo has often found its demonstration in these verses, interpreted explicitly (and therefore even against Varchi) as an expression of the Plotinian theory of the idea in the artist's mind.[48]

It should also be mentioned that Leon Battista Alberti, in his *De statua*, had expressed the concept of the statue hidden in the block of marble but potentially present within it, adopting therefore the Aristotelian expression Varchi reused.[49] Although it can still be observed that the use of metaphors connected with sculpture is present in Petrarchist poetry,[50] it does not seem that in any of the examples which can be considered that the doctrine of the concept in the artist's mind is seen specifically. While in Petrarch and in the following lyric tradition the motif of the stone to be carved seems to be only a rhetorically precious image, it can be observed that quite obviously Michelangelo uses it as a sculptor who certainly knows both the technical aspect of the art of *levare* and the inner creative process of an artist.

Given the possibility of reducing the metaphor of sonnet 151 to a substantially Aristotelian concept, we can return to the issue that was raised: that is whether we can detect an influence of Plotinus' passage on Michelangelo.

The answer can only be cautious. The use of the concept of the figure to be sculpted being already present in the marble block is Aristotelian and had been expressed by Alberti, so it is not necessary to postulate contacts, if not with Plotinus' words at least with his thought, that appear unproven.

But the possibility still remains that Michelangelo had gained indirect knowledge of the Plotinian passages in which sculpture-related metaphors were used, from the men of letters he was in contact with. As I mentioned earlier, this could have occurred, for example, in a juvenile stage of his life in Florence, especially considering that in exactly those years[51] Ficino's Latin translation of Plotinus[52] had finally made the pagan philosopher accessible to a greater number of educated people, who could have noticed the appeal of the metaphor of the treatise *On the Beautiful* and communicated it to a young sculptor of recognized talent.

As a hypothesis, this statement is not demonstrable in any way and may even appear naïve. But it is perhaps possible to admit that an affinity between the metaphor used by Plotinus and the one by Michelangelo exists. In which case, one may choose to define it as a mere product of chance or the effect of a distant and pale reminiscence, by Michelangelo, of notions learned from someone else about Plotinus' writings.

If this affinity cannot be recognized, we might just accept the suggestion of Plotinus' passage, which, with its stress on artists' continuous effort to let the ideal form shine, may at least be a comment on Michelangelo's activity, both for the supreme smoothness of his early works and his dissatisfaction expressed in the *non-finito* in relation to the inner *concetto*.

4

Gold and Light

The beauty of what is not compounded

In Plotinus, the issue about the beauty of simple beings is a properly aesthetic matter, which is somehow transcended by its metaphysical significance. This difference, or even transcendence, imposes itself even on the later tradition, as can be seen in Gregory of Nyssa. What is paradigmatic is that this reflection on a specifically aesthetic problem was firstly created in an artistic environment, evolved then to a properly metaphysical level, and ended up dominating again the expression of art. This outcome is, perhaps, independent from the intentions of the philosophers in general, or at least of Plotinus. However it gave rise to a trend that can be identified as the dominant one in late antique art, according to the definitions of those who pioneered the studies in this field. In particular, it has often been noted – and here I would mention Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli[1] as an example of this position – that the profound changes in the visual arts of late antiquity are related, although maybe indirectly, to Plotinus' thought, and in general to the new attention paid to spiritual needs.

Plotinus' and then Basil's reflections on uncompounded beauty such as that of light and gold, which cannot be intended only by means of proportion, appear to have a direct influence on the new aesthetics of some artworks where these two elements become dominant, for example in mosaics. It is well known that light is one of the main themes used in the *Enneads* and, among the many metaphors that Plotinus chooses in order to express intelligible reality, it is his favourite, following of course the Platonic image of the sun in the *Republic*. The following text does not concern light as a metaphor, but poses questions on an issue of aesthetic nature.

In *Enn*. I 6 the philosopher considers more than one aspect of the nature of beauty:

> Λέγεται μὲν δὴ παρὰ πάντων, ὡς εἰπεῖν, ὡς συμμετρία τῶν μερῶν πρὸς ἄλληλα καὶ πρὸς τὸ ὅλον τό τε τῆς εὐχροίας προστεθὲν τὸ πρὸς τὴν ὄψιν κάλλος ποιεῖ καὶ ἔστιν αὐτοῖς καὶ ὅλως τοῖς ἄλλοις πᾶσι τὸ καλοῖς εἶναι τὸ συμμέτροις καὶ μεμετρημένοις ὑπάρχειν· οἷς ἁπλοῦν οὐδέν, μόνον δὲ τὸ σύνθετον ἐξ ἀνάγκης καλὸν ὑπάρξει· τό τε ὅλον ἔσται καλὸν αὐτοῖς, τὰ δὲ μέρη ἕκαστα οὐχ ἕξει παρ´ἑαυτῶν τὸ καλὰ εἶναι, πρὸς δὲ τὸ ὅλον συντελοῦντα, ἵνα καλὸν ᾖ· καίτοι δεῖ, εἴπερ ὅλον, καὶ τὰ μέρη καλὰ εἶναι· οὐ γὰρ δὴ ἐξ αἰσχρῶν, ἀλλὰ πάντα κατειληφέναι τὸ κάλλος. Τά τε χρώματα αὐτοῖς τὰ καλά, οἷον καὶ τὸ τοῦ ἡλίου φῶς, ἁπλᾶ ὄντα, οὐκ ἐκ συμμετρίας ἔχοντα τὸ κάλλος ἔξω ἔσται τοῦ καλὰ εἶναι. Χρυσός τε δὴ πῶς καλόν; Καὶ νυκτὸς ἡ ἀστραπὴ ἢ ἄστρα ὁρᾶσθαι τῷ καλά;
>
> Nearly everyone says that it is good proportion of the parts to each other and to the whole, with the addition of good colour, which produces visible beauty, and that with the objects of sight and generally with everything else, being beautiful is being well-proportioned and measured. On this theory nothing single and simple but only a composite thing will have any beauty. It will be the whole which is beautiful, and the parts will not have the property of beauty by themselves, but will contribute to the beauty of the whole. But if the whole is beautiful the parts must be beautiful too; a beautiful whole can certainly not be composed of ugly parts; all the parts must have beauty. For these people, too, beautiful colours, and the light of the sun as well, since they are simple and do not derive their beautifulness from good proportion, will be excluded from beauty. And how do they think gold manages to be beautiful? And what makes lightning in the night and stars beautiful to see?[2]

Here Plotinus, addressing his disciples, refers to ancient texts, some of which are unknown to us, and reports the view that the proper proportion between the parties determines beauty. The Greek word to express this proportional ratio is συμμετρία, which may be simply translated as 'symmetry' but in fact conveys a much broader meaning than its modern equivalent, as it is not reduced to mere axial symmetry, simple or multiple, but precisely expresses the harmonious proportion between the parts.

To define this proportion as the reason causing things to be beautiful is what could be called a classical theory of beauty, which, although it was probably defined at first by a sculptor, Polykleitos, was then accepted in general and applied to both artistic and natural beauty. It is significant that, in the search for the reasons that make a work of art beautiful, it was an artist who

tried to define what constitutes beauty. It is, however, appropriate to repeat what must necessarily be specified when it comes to ancient and late ancient aesthetics, and that is that it is not an autonomous discipline and, with regard to the reflection on art, it does not consider the work of art from the same point of view from which we look at it today. In the case of Polykleitos, in fact, his considerations are applicable in the first instance to nature, and only therefore to the work of art. This is beautiful simply as *mimesis* of beautiful nature, but this kind of *mimesis* is the product of what we call idealization, that is the election of different parts for the production of a perfect body, an element that characterizes the art of the archaic and classical period and that will affect every classicism since then.

Following the dominant conception in the fifth and fourth centuries BC, it is possible to find beauty in nature and discern, therefore, which details are beautiful in it and which are not. Obviously, this concept produces a series of problems that are still relevant for aesthetics today,[3] but suffice it to consider, with regard to our limited scope, that for some centuries, more or less widely, Polykleitos' definition seemed satisfactory. It is Plotinus who highlights its limitations. It is worth noting that, at the end of the quoted passage, Plotinus assumes that a definition of beauty based solely on good proportion is to be rejected. In fact, the philosopher does not question whether gold or light are beautiful, but what *makes* them beautiful. Their beauty for Plotinus, in fact, seems to be self-evident and he does not consider it necessary to explain it; moreover, the fact that light, stars and gold have beauty is a common theme in antiquity, for example, in Pindar.[4] It is against this popular conception that in Plato's *Hippias Major* the argument of beauty as residing in gold is refused.[5] Indeed Socrates' point in the dialogue is not whether gold is beautiful, but whether it is the element which can give beauty to everything, which is not the case. However, the discussion in the *Hippias* is not strictly relevant to Plotinus' reflection, although he certainly knew of it.

All the examples given by Plotinus are related to light effects: he brings together gold and stars because they have in common the effect of the shining of light, to a greater or lesser degree, which in the case of the sun reaches obviously its highest point. The reason why beautiful colours are in this list is that colour is related to the action of light, in the sense that it is the same light which produces the vision and therefore the enjoyment of the colour: this is

indeed the Aristotelian conception to which Plotinus himself refers in VI 7 (38) 21, 11,[6] where he states that light allows us to see the colour of sensible objects.

It is important to recall that, in the search for the nature of the beautiful, the distinction between natural beauty and artistic beauty is not always clear, although this distinction exists in theory. In fact, due to the conception of art as *mimemis*, the same principles of natural beauty also apply to artistic beauty.[7] The question of artistic and natural beauty leads to a complex issue, which can only be briefly mentioned here, that of the relationship between nature and art in general, which Aristotle had defined theoretically. In fact, as it has been observed,[8] every translation of the words *physis* and *techne* is unsuitable to explain the original meaning of the two terms. In ancient Greek, there is no word for what we call art in general – and even more importantly there is no aesthetics as a discipline – but under the name of *techne*, which indicates the techniques as well as the arts, we can identify some elements that pertain to aesthetic issues.

Aristotle, at the beginning of *Phys.* II, introduces a distinction between natural entities and entities that are the result of artificial production. This is in order to help, through an analogy with a concept better known to his listener/reader, to understand what *physis* is and what constitutes the natural *telos*. In our discussion on the beautiful in art, the analogy between the two levels of natural and artificial production, however, can be seen in the opposite direction, as it is beauty in nature that becomes normative for beauty in artistic production. In fact, the idea that *techne* is *mimesis* of *physis* is at the heart of the Greek perception of the artistic problem in general and in particular it gives rise to the different positions of Plato and Aristotle on the value to be attributed to the activity of the artist. As a consequence, there is always an analogy and a tension between the two spheres of nature and art, which is the background in our investigation of the concept of Plotinus and its possible influence on artistic production.

The issue of good proportion

According to Plotinus, beauty resides not in symmetry or harmonious proportion, but in the correspondence to the divine idea. In his treatise *On the*

Intelligible Beauty Plotinus reprises this theme in a new attempt to give a correct definition of the nature of beauty. Here the inspiration is natural beauty, and in this case Plotinus shows his connection with the classical world, chosing Helen as an *exemplum*, as he does also elsewhere.[9] In this passage Plotinus seems to question the properly erotic attraction, yet his conclusions, fully satisfying the horizon of his system, also have a connection with the problem of artistic beauty:

> Τί οὖν τὸ κάλλος ἐστὶν ἐν τούτοις; Οὐ γὰρ δὴ τὸ αἷμα καὶ τὰ καταμήνια· ἀλλὰ καὶ χρόα ἄλλη τούτων καὶ σχῆμα ἢ οὐδὲν ἤ τι ἄσχημον ἢ οἷον τὸ περιέχον ἁπλοῦν τι, οἷα ὕλη. Πόθεν δὴ ἐξέλαμψε τὸ τῆς Ἑλένης τῆς περιμαχήτου κάλλος, ἢ ὅσαι γυναικῶν Ἀφροδίτης ὅμοιαι κάλλει; Ἐπεὶ καὶ τὸ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης αὐτῆς πόθεν, ἢ εἴ τις ὅλως καλὸς ἄνθρωπος ἢ θεὸς τῶν ἄν εἰς ὄψιν ἐλθόντων ἢ καὶ μὴ ἰόντων, ἐχόντων δὲ ἐπ᾽ αὐτοῖς ὁραθὲν ἂν κάλλος; Ἆρ᾽ οὐκ εἶδος μὲν πανταχοῦ τοῦτο, ἦκον δὲ ἐπὶ τὸ γενόμενον ἐκ τοῦ ποιήσαντος, ὥσπερ ἐν ταῖς τέχναις ἐλέγετο ἐπὶ τὰ τεχνητὰ ἰέναι παρὰ τῶν τεχνῶν;
>
> What then is the beauty in these? Certainly not the blood and the menstrual fluid; rather, the colour of these is different and their shape is either no shape or a shapeless shape or like that which delimits something simple. From what source, then, did the beauty of Helen whom men fought for shine out, or that of all the women like Aphrodite in beauty? Then again, what is the beauty of Aphrodite herself, or of any other beautiful human being or of any god of those who appear visibly, or even of those who do not appear but have in themselves a beauty which could be seen? Is not this beauty everywhere form, which comes from the maker upon which he has brought into being, as in the arts it was said to come from the arts upon their works?[10]

The source of the beautiful is therefore the *eidos*, echoing Plato's *Symposium*. The issue about proportion probably arises from the considerations and theoretical efforts of the artists themselves, if we consider the case of Polykleitos, but inevitably attracts philosophical interest. Polykleitos in his C*anon* had theorized the beautiful proportions of a human body, identifying a geometric perfection of nature which is independent from natural accidents.[11] Although his treatise is lost, we can find a summary of Polykleitos' writing in Galen, who quotes Chrysippus.[12] In the two fragments attributed to the sculptor the importance of mathematical proportion is also apparent.[13]

In Plato the concept of beauty as based on symmetry and proportion is presented in the *Philebus*, for example, where symmetry and *metriōtes* are united as characters of beauty,[14] and in the context of the *Timaeus*, where the influence of Pythagoreanism is more noticeable: what is beautiful features *metron* and is therefore *symmetron*.[15] It is then Aristotle who resumes the concept of symmetry as an element for the definition of beauty, for example in *Metaph*. M 3, 1078th 36 ff.: Τοῦ δὲ καλοῦ μέγιστα εἴδη τάξις καὶ συμμετρία καὶ τὸ ὡρισμένον ἃ μάλιστα δεικνύουσιν αἱ μαθηματικαὶ ἐπιστῆμαι. It seems, though, that, more than to Aristotle, Plotinus refers to the Stoics in the passage of *Enn*. I 6 and that he criticizes their conception of beauty as reductive. Many Stoic texts (*SVF* III 278, 279, 392, 472) show the doctrine of beauty as the symmetry of the parts.

What then is the beauty of gold and the stars, in a word, the beauty of what is uncompounded, of which light is the clearest example? Plotinus' reply closely follows Plato's *Symposium*, but adapting it to his specific system:

> Πῶς δὲ καλὰ κἀκεῖνα καὶ ταῦτα; Μετοχῇ εἴδους φαμὲν ταῦτα. [. . .] Προσιὸν οὖν τὸ εἶδος τὸ μὲν ἐκ πολλῶν ἐσόμενον μερῶν ἓν συνθέσει συνέταξέ τε καὶ εἰς μίαν συντέλειαν ἤγαγε καὶ ἓν τῇ ὁμολογίᾳ πεποίηκεν, ἐπείπερ ἓν ἦν αὐτὸ ἕν τε ἔδει τὸ μορφούμενον εἶναι ὡς δυνατὸν αὐτῷ ἐκ πολλῶν ὄντι. Ἵδρυται οὖν ἐπ´ αὐτοῦ τὸ κάλλος ἤδη εἰς ἓν συναχθέντος καὶ τοῖς μέρεσι διδὸν ἑαυτὸ καὶ τοῖς ὅλοις.
>
> But how are both the things in that world and the things in this beautiful? We maintain that the things in this world are beautiful by participating in form. [. . .] The form, then, approaches and composes that which is to come into being from many parts into a single ordered whole; it brings it into a completed unity and makes it one by agreement of its parts; for since it is one itself, that which is shaped by it must also be one as far as a thing can be which is composed of many parts. So beauty rests upon the material thing when it has been brought into unity, and gives itself to parts and wholes alike.[16]

In order to explain how the action of the *eidos* can inform unity, Plotinus uses an analogy with the art of architecture, in a way that justifies what has been said earlier about the intersection between the concept of physical and artistic beauty that is the backdrop of our discussion:

> Ὅταν δὲ ἕν τι καὶ ὁμοιομερὲς καταλάβῃ, εἰς ὅλον δίδωσι τὸ αὐτό· οἷον ὁτὲ μὲν πάσῃ οἰκίᾳ μετὰ τῶν μερῶν, ὁτὲ δὲ ἑνὶ λίθῳ διδοίη τις φύσις τὸ κάλλος,

> τῇ δὲ ἡ τέχνη. Οὕτω μὲν δὴ τὸ καλὸν σῶμα γίγνεται λόγου ἀπὸ θείων ἐλθόντος κοινωνίᾳ.
>
> When it comes upon something that is one and composed of like parts it gives the same gift to the whole; as sometimes art gives beauty to a single stone. So then the beautiful body comes into being by sharing in a formative power which comes from the divine forms.[17]

Jean-Marc Narbonne,[18] in his comment to Plotinus' treatise, highlights that in the *Enneads* the statement of the primacy of the *eidos* on symmetry in the creation of beauty cannot be found elsewhere in Plotinus, if not in a nuanced manner in VI 7 (38) 22, 24–26,[19] although it should be noted that this doctrine is not inconsistent with what Plotinus says later in *Enn.* V 8. Narbonne believes that Plotinus is not averse to identifying in good proportion the reason for beauty with regard to material bodies, and indeed it is inconceivable that the philosopher would refuse this conception. It is also true that his confutation of the classical concept of beauty leaves no trace in the later Neoplatonists, and neither Porphyry nor Iamblichus nor Proclus nor Damascius seem to have questioned that beauty in nature and in art lies in good proportion.

It could be useful however at this point to recall Tatarkiewicz's observation about the position of the Neoplatonists towards art, especially in later Neoplatonism: they did not support the art that corresponded to their aesthetic principles, while the Christians did.[20] This is obviously due to their defence of paganism, which inevitably led them to appreciate the art linked to the traditional religion. The motivation can also be due to the lack of interest, in some of them, in art itself: in this sense, it is noticeable how, in the fragments of Porphyry's *Peri agalmaton*, the statues are seen functionally as vehicles of worship and, despite his attention to what we would today call the iconography of the divine figures,[21] no mention is made of properly aesthetic features.[22]

What remains of Porphyry's text can be found in Eusebius, who reports its beginning and some passages. One of the most relevant fragments for our discussion is the 352 Smith,[23] where Porphyry defines the divine as φωτοειδής and argues that it is therefore for this reason that a διαυγής material is needed to represent it, either crystal or Parian marble or ivory, and gold to express the

fire, because of its incorruptible nature. It is also interesting to note that Porphyry says that black stone is used in order to express the unknowability of the divine. The fact that no interest is shown in the formal values of statues but purely their symbolic content, should warn us about the cultural gap existing between late antiquity and modern and contemporary thought.

Narbonne suggests that Plotinus, rather than criticizing the classical concept of harmonious proportion, in this passage is refusing the mechanistic and superficial symmetry of the Stoics in favour of a unitarian point of view. Plotinus would have 'une vision soit franchement positive, soit plus nuancée mais néanmoins favorable à l'égard du rôle de la symétrie dans la constitution du beau'.[24] On the other hand Narbonne believes that this conception, which might appear to be original and specific to Plotinus, derives in fact from *Phaedo* 100 c–d.[25]

Certainly Narbonne's indications are punctual and enlightening, but it could be useful to add a comment. We should not miss what is the actual purpose of Plotinus in this case (and Narbonne in fact underlines that 'le dessein exact de la critique de la symétrie qui constitue le cœur de l'argumentation de Plotin concernant la beauté sensible [chap. 1–3], n'a pas bien été identifié'): it could be argued in fact that the alleged criticism of symmetry is indeed made in order to highlight the beauty of simple bodies such as colour and light. Precisely in what is not compounded, because of its simplicity and unity, it is easier to grasp the correspondence to *eidos*.[26] And it is in this more direct connection of what is simple to an intelligible form (a notion fully consistent with Plato's approach) compared to what derives its beauty from a proportionate composition that the sense of Plotinus' argument lies. Symmetry for Plotinus may indeed be understood as one of the effects of beauty, but not as its cause, as clearly defined by Giovanni Lombardo.[27]

It seems therefore that Plotinus' position is more marked than Narbonne acknowledges. The peculiarity of the philosopher should be identified precisely in the need to define a source of the beauty of simple bodies: that the compounds, such as physical objects, can find in symmetry the reason for their being beautiful can well be accepted, but it is precisely in defining what is not compounded that Plotinus makes the theoretical leap which characterizes his reflection.

Stylistic trends in the art of late antiquity

This interest in the ideal source of beauty seems to have a parallel in the artistic production and in the change in taste which can be observed since the third century. This is not to say that Plotinus has affected directly the artistic expression in late antiquity, which would be simplicistic, although it has often been claimed. It is rather more cautious to emphasize that Plotinus' thought has a parallel,[28] as far as we can discern, in the artistic production of the time, without having to infer any causality in one way or the other.

In this regard it could be useful to provide an example that seems to illustrate, in a single artwork, some of the properties investigated by Plotinus. Again, this is not in the sense that there is an art specifically inspired by Neoplatonism, and even less a direct influence of Plotinus on artistic production. There is certainly, though, a common taste for the brilliance of gold, light and colour, which is aimed to express the moral qualities of the noble materials.[29] An example of this is the so-called Lycurgus Cup[30] now in the British Museum (see Figure 4.1), the only extant complete artefact created in dichroic glass. This cup, which can be assigned to the late third or early fourth century AD and apparently was intended for a client of high rank, perhaps imperial, depicts a pagan myth (the arrogant king Lycurgus punished by Dionysus) and is executed with a particularly complex technique, in which the decoration is carved with great skill in the thick surface of the glass, with some elements in the round, connected to the surface by glass bridges. By the very nature of the process of carving, the figures are schematic and expressive, an aspect of late antique art that can also be seen in many sculptural representations. The reason to mention this object in this context, however, is the material itself, the dichroic glass, which has the characteristic of presenting two different colours, greenish when illuminated from the outside, reddish when light shines through the glass. The beauty of the object comes from the connection between light and colour, two of the elements that Plotinus identified in his text. To this it could be added, although it is a purely incidental observation, that the chromatic phenomenon of the glass is due to the inclusion of gold particles within its mass,[31] so that it could be said that some characteristic elements of the aesthetic sensibility of an era are grouped in a single artefact.

Figure 4.1 Lycurgus Cup, second half of the third century or first half of the fourth century AD. British Museum, London (© Trustees of the British Museum).

Plotinus gave a clear and consistent view of the reason why sensible beings are beautiful. This effort seems to come from the conceptual view of the inadequacy of classical theory, based on mathematical proportion, in explaining the beauty of the entities that are not composed. The Neoplatonists after Plotinus did not consider his criticism of the concept of beauty: Porphyry, in fact, defends the classical conception, as well as Iamblichus, Proclus and Damascius. This is an aspect of Plotinus' peculiar fate in the Platonic tradition in late antiquity: apart from a central period of Porphyry's production, Neoplatonism developed in a coherent system but the thought of Plotinus was neglected.[32] The Christians who were closer to the refined pagan culture, instead, were drawn to the spiritual power and expression of Plotinus' thought, even if they could not accept many of its fundamental elements.

Plotinus' view on good proportion in Basil and Gregory of Nyssa

It was Basil in particular who reported Plotinus' reflection in the second of his *Homilies on the Hexaëmeron*. The Bishop of Caesarea, commenting on the biblical account of the Creation, refused the kind of allegorical exegesis that had been promoted by Origen – which Gregory, Basil's brother, instead embraced. Basil questions, like Plotinus, the reason why something physical can be defined as beautiful. Although Basil's philosophical talent is limited, he nevertheless understands Plotinus' position and repeats it in a rhetorically convincing way:

> Εἰ δὲ τὸ ἐν σώματι καλὸν ἐκ τῆς πρὸς ἄλληλα τῶν μερῶν συμμετρίας, καὶ τῆς ἐπιφαινομένης εὐχροίας, τὸ εἶναι ἔχει, πῶς ἐπὶ τοῦ φωτὸς ἁπλοῦ τὴν φύσιν ὄντος καὶ ὁμοιομεροῦς, ὁ τοῦ καλοῦ διασώζεται λόγος; Ἢ ὅτι τῷ φωτὶ τὸ σύμμετρον οὐκ ἐν τοῖς ἰδίοις αὐτοῦ μέρεσιν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐν τῷ πρὸς τὴν ὄψιν ἀλύπῳ καὶ προσηνεῖ μαρτυρεῖται; Οὕτω γὰρ καὶ χρυσὸς καλὸς, οὐκ ἐκ τῆς τῶν μερῶν συμμετρίας, ἀλλ᾽ ἐκ τῆς εὐχροίας μόνης, τὸ ἐπαγωγὸν πρὸς τὴν ὄψιν καὶ τὸ τερπνὸν κεκτημένος. Καὶ ἕσπερος ἀστέρων κάλλιστος, οὐ διὰ τὸ ἀναλογοῦντα ἔχειν τὰ μέρη ἐξ ὧν συνέστηκεν, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ ἄλυπόν τινα καὶ ἡδεῖαν τὴν ἀπ᾽ αὐτοῦ αὐγὴν ἐμπίπτειν τοῖς ὄμμασιν.

> But, if beauty in bodies results from symmetry of parts, and the harmonious appearance of colours, how in a simple and homogeneous essence like light, can this idea of beauty be preserved? Would not the symmetry in light be less shown in its parts than in the pleasure and delight at the sight of it? Such is also the beauty of gold, which it owes not to the happy mingling of its parts, but only to its beautiful colour which has a charm attractive to the eyes.
>
> Thus again, the evening star is the most beautiful of the stars: not that the parts of which it is composed form a harmonious whole; but thanks to the unalloyed and beautiful brightness which meets our eyes.[33]

John Rist[34] refuses to see in this text a derivation from Plotinus, preferring to consider Basil's reflection as independent from a pagan source, but this is an argument that does not seem to match the textual evidence, and the closeness between the two texts was first certified by Henry in the *États*[35] and as such has been repeated recently by Narbonne. It seems certainly possible that Basil drew on Plotinus, although Rist is certainly right in limiting the Cappadocian Father's conceptual derivation from the Neoplatonic philosopher.

One of the attempts to outline a history of aesthetics of the early Christian centuries was carried out by Quintino Cataudella[36] who, in tracing from a careful and precisely philological point of view the scattered notes about art by Christian writers, demonstrated the formal and conceptual debt that they had to Plotinus. For this reason, it seems reasonable to affirm that Plotinus' reflections on the beauty of gold and light, perhaps due to the recovery of the theme by Basil, influenced the taste of late antiquity for the representation of light and lighting effects of gold in art and architecture.

It should be noted that Basil, although he seems to understand the doctrine of Plotinus and to appreciate it, in another passage of the same homilies, however, reprises the classic conception that defines beauty as based on symmetry. In fact, he somehow contradicts himself in the following homily,[37] where, identifying the beauty of the individual elements in accordance to the whole, he states that a statue is beautiful not in the individual parts, as a hand or an eye, but only in its entirety. In affirming this, Basil nullifies the innovative dimension of the insertion of a Neoplatonic conception within his exegesis, bringing his reflection back to a traditional thinking.

It is his brother Gregory who reflects instead more directly the legacy of Plotinus, when he says that the beauty of individuals derives from the world of forms. It should be noted that Gregory of Nyssa differs from Plotinus in that the Neoplatonist tends to distinguish, according to the Platonic conception of the *Republic*, good and beautiful,[38] while for Gregory they coincide.[39]

It is in a passage from his treatise *On the constitution of man* that Gregory repeats Plotinus' arguments on form as the cause of beauty. The context in which he develops his remarks is that of the relationship between the intelligible principle of man and his physical body. Here Gregory includes what he defines 'a most interesting doctrine':

> Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ τὸ κάλλιστον πάντων καὶ ἐξοχώτατον ἀγαθὸν αὐτὸ τὸ Θεῖόν ἐστι, πρὸς ὃ πάντα νένευκεν, ὅσα τοῦ καλοῦ τὴν ἔφεσιν ἔχει, διὰ τοῦτό φαμεν καὶ τὸν νοῦν, ἅτε κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ καλλίστου γενόμενον, ἕως ἂν μετέχῃ τῆς πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον ὁμοιότητος, καθόσον ἐνδέχεται, καὶ αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ καλῷ διαμένειν, εἰ δέ πως ἔξω γένοιτο τούτου, γυμνοῦσθαι τοῦ κάλλους ἐν ᾧ ἦν. Ὥσπερ δὲ ἔφαμεν τῇ ὁμοιώσει τοῦ πρωτοτύπου κάλλους κατακοσμεῖσθαι τὸν νοῦν, οἷόν τι κάτοπτρον τῷ χαρακτῆρι τοῦ ἐμφαινομένου μορφούμενον· κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν ἀναλογίαν, καὶ τὴν οἰκονομουμένην ὑπ' αὐτοῦ φύσιν ἔχεσθαι τοῦ νοῦ λογιζόμεθα, καὶ τῷ παρακειμένῳ κάλλει καὶ αὐτὴν κοσμεῖσθαι οἷόν τι κατόπτρου κάτοπτρον γινομένην·
>
> For since the most beautiful and supreme good of all is the Divinity itself, to which incline all things that have a tendency towards what is beautiful and good, we therefore say that the mind, as being in the image of the most beautiful, itself also remains in beauty and goodness so long as it partakes as far as is possible in its likeness to the archetype; but if it were at all to depart from this it is deprived of that beauty in which it was. And as we said that the mind was adorned by the likeness of the archetypal beauty, being formed as though it were a mirror to receive the figure of that which it expresses, we consider that the nature which is governed by it is attached to the mind in the same relation, and that it too is adorned by the beauty that the mind gives, being, so to say, a mirror of the mirror.[40]

Although it is not possible to identify a specific source for this text, it can be considered a significant example of the Neoplatonic influence on Gregory of

Nyssa. The concept of participating in intelligible beauty could be well described as generally Platonic, but the notion of the *nous*, which receives the beauty of the archetype and gives it to nature (here intended as the physical part of man), is more specifically Neoplatonic. The image of the mirror, too, is one of the metaphors most frequently used by Plotinus.[41]

Another text that I would like to recall and that in this case appears to have a literal echo of Plotinus is in the apology written by the Nyssenus to defend but also to integrate the exegesis of Basil on the narration of the six days of Creation. Reprising the classic theme of the beauty of natural beings, even the most repulsive, which from Aristotle passed to the Stoics, and which Plotinus had introduced in the first of his treatises *On Providence*,[42] Gregory says: ἀλλ᾽ οὐ πρὸς τὴν ὥραν τῶν γεγονότων ὅ θεῖος ὀφθαλμὸς βλέπων ἐν εὐχροίᾳ τινὶ καὶ εὐμορφίᾳ τὸ καλὸν ὁρίζεται ἀλλ᾽ ἐν τῷ ἕκαστον, καθὸ ἔστι, τελείαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἔχειν τὴν φύσιν: 'The divine eye, looking at the exterior aspect of the creatures, did not confine the beautiful in a nice colour or a fine shape, but in the fact that each one, as it is, has a perfect nature in itself.'[43] In this case the concept is properly analogue to Plotinus' position, and the fact that Gregory denies the presence of beauty in the *euchroia* or *eumorphia* could be seen as in relation with what Plotinus stated in the text of the treatise 8 of the fifth *Ennead* that we have already mentioned, where ideal beauty is defined as the cause of the sensible one and that beauty is not in *croia* nor in *schema*.[44]

The last of Gregory's texts that I would like to recall here addresses a dogmatic problem of primary importance, derived from Origen. Gregory intends to demonstrate how evil is finite and is simply a privation of good, again a theme to be found in Plotinus. To indicate the limitations of evil and the reality of *apokatastasis*, he uses an astronomical analogy:

> Ἀλλ᾽ οὐχ οὕτως ἐστὶν ἰσχυρὸν ἡ κακία, ὡς τῆς ἀγαθῆς ὑπερισχύσαι δυνάμεως· οὐδὲ κρείττων καὶ μονιμωτέρα τῆς, Θεοῦ σοφίας ἡ τῆς φύσεως ἡμῶν ἀβουλία. Οὐδὲ γάρ ἐστι δυνατὸν τὸ τρεπόμενόν τε καὶ ἀλλοιούμενον, τοῦ ἀεὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχοντος, καὶ ἐν τῷ ἀγαθῷ πεπηγότος, ἐπικρατέστερόν τε καὶ μονιμώτερον εἶναι· ἀλλ᾽ ἡ μὲν θεία βουλὴ πάντη τε καὶ πάντως τὸ ἀμετάθετον ἔχει, τὸ δὲ τρεπτὸν τῆς φύσεως ἡμῶν οὐδὲ ἐν τῷ κακῷ πάγιον μένει. Τὸ γὰρ ἀεὶ πάντως κινούμενον, εἰ μὲν πρὸς τὸ καλὸν ἔχοι τὴν πρόοδον, διὰ τὸ ἀόριστον τοῦ διεξοδευομένου πράγματος οὐδέποτε

λήξει τῆς ἐπὶ τὰ πρόσω φορᾶς. Οὐδὲ γὰρ εὑρήσει ζητουμένου; πέρας οὐδὲν, οὗ δραξάμενον στήσεταί ποτε τῆς κινήσεως. Εἰ δὲ πρὸς τὸ ἐναντίον τὴν ῥοπὴν σχοίη. ἐπειδὰν διανύσῃ τῆς κακίας τὸν δρόμον, καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ ἀκρότατον τοῦ κακοῦ μέτρον ἀφίκηται· τότε τὸ τῆς ὁρμῆς ἀεικίνητον οὐδεμίαν ἐκ φύσεως στάσιν εὑρίσκον, ἐπειδὰν διαδράμῃ τὸ ἐν κακίᾳ διάστημα, κατ᾽ ἀνάγκην ἐπὶ τὸ ἀγαθὸν τρέπει τὴν κίνησιν. Μὴ γὰρ προϊούσης κακίας ἐπὶ τὸ ἀόριστον, ἀλλ᾽ ἀναγκαίοις πέρασι κατειλημμένης, ἀκολούθως ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ διαδοχὴ τὸ πέρας τῆς κακίας ἐκδέχεται. Καὶ οὕτω, καθὼς εἴρηται, τὸ ἀεικίνητον ἡμῶν τῆς φύσεως πάλιν ὕστατον ἐπὶ τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἀνατρέχει πορείαν, τῇ μνήμῃ τῶν προδεδυστυχημένων πρὸς τὸ μὴ πάλιν ἐναλῶναι τοῖς ἴσοις σωφρονιζόμενον. Οὐκοῦν ἔσται πάλιν ἐν καλοῖς ὁ δρόμος ἡμῖν, διὰ τὸ πέρασιν ἀναγκαίοις περιωρίσθαι τῆς κακίας τὴν φύσιν. Καθάπερ γὰρ οἱ δεινοὶ τὰ μετέωρα, τοῦ μὲν φωτὸς πάντα λέγουσι τὸν κόσμον εἶναι κατάπλεων, τὸ δὲ σκότος τῇ ἀντιφράξει τοῦ κατὰ τὴν γῆν σώματος ἀποσκιαζόμενον γίνεσθαι (ἀλλὰ τοῦτο μὲν κατὰ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ σφαιροειδοῦς σώματος, κατὰ νώτου τῆς ἡλιακῆς ἀκτῖνος κωνοειδῶς κατακλείεσθαι, τὸν δὲ ἥλιον πολλαπλασίονι τῷ μεγέθει τὴν γῆν ὑπερβάλλοντα, πανταχόθεν αὐτὴν ταῖς ἀκτῖσιν ἐν κύκλῳ περιπτυσσόμενον, συνάπτειν κατὰ τὸ πέρας τοῦ κώνου τὰς τοῦ φωτὸς συμβολὰς, ὥστε καθ᾽ ὑπόθεσιν, εἰ γένοιτό τινι δύναμις διαβῆναι τὸ μέτρον, εἰς ὅσον ἐκτείνεται ἡ σκιὰ, πάντως ἂν ἐν φωτὶ γενέσθαι μὴ διακοπτομένῳ ὑπὸ τοῦ σκότους)· οὕτως οἶμαι δεῖν καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν διανοεῖσθαι, ὅτι διεξελθόντες τὸν τῆς κακίας ὅρον, ἐπειδὰν ἐν τῷ ἄκρῳ γενώμεθα τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν σκιᾶς, πάλιν ἐν φωτὶ βιοτεύσομεν, ὡς κατὰ τὸ ἀπειροπλάσιον πρὸς τὸ τῆς κακίας μέτρον τῆς τῶν ἀγαθῶν φύσεως περιττευούσης.

Wickedness, however, is not so strong as to prevail over the power of good; nor is the folly of our nature more powerful and more abiding than the wisdom of God: for it is impossible that that which is always mutable and variable should be more firm and more abiding than that which always remains the same and is firmly fixed in goodness: but it is absolutely certain that the Divine counsel possesses immutability, while the changeableness of our nature does not remain settled even in evil.

Now that which is always in motion, if its progress be to good, will never cease moving onwards to what lies before it, by reason of the infinity of the course to be traversed – for it will not find any limit of its object such that when it has apprehended it, it will at last cease its motion: but if its bias be in the opposite direction, when it has finished the course of wickedness and

> reached the extreme limit of evil, then that which is ever moving, finding no halting point for its impulse natural to itself when it has run through the lengths that can be run in wickedness, of necessity turns its motion towards good: for as evil does not extend to infinity, but is comprehended by necessary limits, it would appear that good once more follows in succession upon the limit of evil; and thus, as we have said, the ever-moving character of our nature comes to run its course at the last once more back towards good, being taught the lesson of prudence by the memory of its former misfortunes, to the end that it may never again be in like case. Our course, then, will once more lie in what is good, by reason of the fact that the nature of evil is bounded by necessary limits. For just as those skilled in astronomy tell us that the whole universe is full of light, and that darkness is made to cast its shadow by the interposition of the body formed by the earth; and that this darkness is shut off from the rays of the sun, in the shape of a cone, according to the figure of the sphere-shaped body, and behind it; while the sun, exceeding the earth by a size many times as great as its own, enfolding it round about on all sides with its rays, unites at the limit of the cone the concurrent streams of light; so that if (to suppose the case) any one had the power of passing beyond the measure to which the shadow extends, he would certainly find himself in light unbroken by darkness; – even so I think that we ought to understand about ourselves, that on passing the limit of wickedness we shall again have our conversation in light, as the nature of good, when compared with the measure of wickedness, is incalculably superabundant.[45]

In this passage light is not used as a metaphor to express the regulatory function of the world of forms, in the manner of Plato, or to describe the emanation from the first principle of the hypostasis, like Plotinus. The reference to the physical reality of light, described in scientific terms, and of the necessarily limited extension of shadow, gives the doctrine itself, in the intention of the Bishop of Nyssa, an objective truth. Here we will not dwell on the problems that the doctrine of *apokatastasis* arises relatively to the orthodoxy of Gregory of Nyssa.[46] What seems more important in this context is that this doctrine fits in a Neoplatonic climate and among the most distinctive of the Christian thinker. Not surprisingly, Gregory expresses it while interpreting a biblical text, in what can be defined as a proper treatise of Neoplatonic Christian anthropology.

What relation do these considerations have with the aesthetic problem of light? More than one might think at first: the concept of light as good, in fact, linked in this example to the limitation of evil, is intrinsically connected to its beauty. In the discussion on the beauty of light in Plotinus and Basil, this is derived from the correspondence to the divine form. Gregory adds, to the new aesthetic interest for light, some considerations that, rather than being merely a metaphor, adopt an astronomical and therefore scientific demonstration. Gregory therefore strengthens the link between physical light and divine light, favouring, even if perhaps unaware of it, the aesthetic taste for effects of light rather than of mass and proportion.

Although none of the thinkers considered here perceived the implications that could be drawn in terms of taste and popular artistic application, traces of their reflection on the beauty of light remain. It is preferable to say 'popular taste' because it is a safe definition, since it is not possible to prove a direct derivation of the trends of late antique art from Plotinus or the Cappadocians. However, as has often been pointed out, the role that Plotinus' reflection had in the development of a type of art that expresses intelligible values cannot be ignored. If Tatarkiewicz[47] could have forced the interpretation of *Enn*. II 8, considering its first chapter as a programme that Plotinus explicitly intended to give to artists, and considering the paintings of Doura Europos as an example of how the philosopher's teaching had a proper artistic application, nevertheless it is clear that in late antiquity a new attention to effects of light, together with the introduction of a symbolic perspective, focused on the definition of the formal and hierarchical nature of the objects represented and not on how they appear (see for example, Figure 4.2),[48] is a significant parallel of the themes seen in the Neoplatonic thinker and in the Cappadocians. This new taste is distinctive of late antiquity, and from this point of view the text of Plotinus, combined with its reprise by Basil (and the corollary of the suggestive passage of Gregory of Nyssa), can contribute to our understanding of the specific nature of the aesthetics of the time, both as a philosophical reflection and in its application in terms of artistic production.[49]

So far we have focused on the theme of light. To return to Plotinus' text, gold falls into the same category of light, because it is clear that for Plotinus as well as for Basil, the beauty of gold does not derive from its material value, but from its nature, reflecting the light and its incorruptibility. If

Figure 4.2 Fragment of a floor mosaic with a personification of Ktisis, first half of the sixth century AD (?). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (source: www.metmuseum.org).

we consider the importance of gold in late antique visual arts (and, from this point of view, of course, in the Middle Ages, given the persistence of the symbolic value of gold in the pictorial representations of icons, in mosaics and in religious art and decoration in general (see Figure 4.3), it is possible to understand how thinkers such as Plotinus and the Cappadocians perhaps anticipated but in any case justified theoretically a tendency of the art of their time. There would be of course, in this respect, much more to say about other Christian thinkers associated with Neoplatonism and who insisted on the theme of light, particularly Augustine and Ps. Dionysius with his elaboration of a metaphysics of light that marked the later theological reflection. But it is, in the case of the Areopagite, a later Neoplatonism whose connection with Plotinus is weaker.

Figure 4.3 Medallion with Saint George from an icon frame, from Constantinople, eleventh century AD. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (source: www.metmuseum.org).

Finally, I suppose that there is nothing theoretically vague or historically unfounded if we say that light, gold, colour and stars, the beauty of which Plotinus identified as depending on the *eidos*, are also stylistic elements in late antiquity, for example in the decoration of buildings such as the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna (see Figure 4.4), one of the most expressive examples of how elements of classical and imperial tradition were translated into a Christian language, in the same way that the Cappadocians translated pagan culture into Christian theology.

Plotinus, from this point of view, appears to have had the curious fate of leaving a visible legacy in the classically trained Christians, with whom

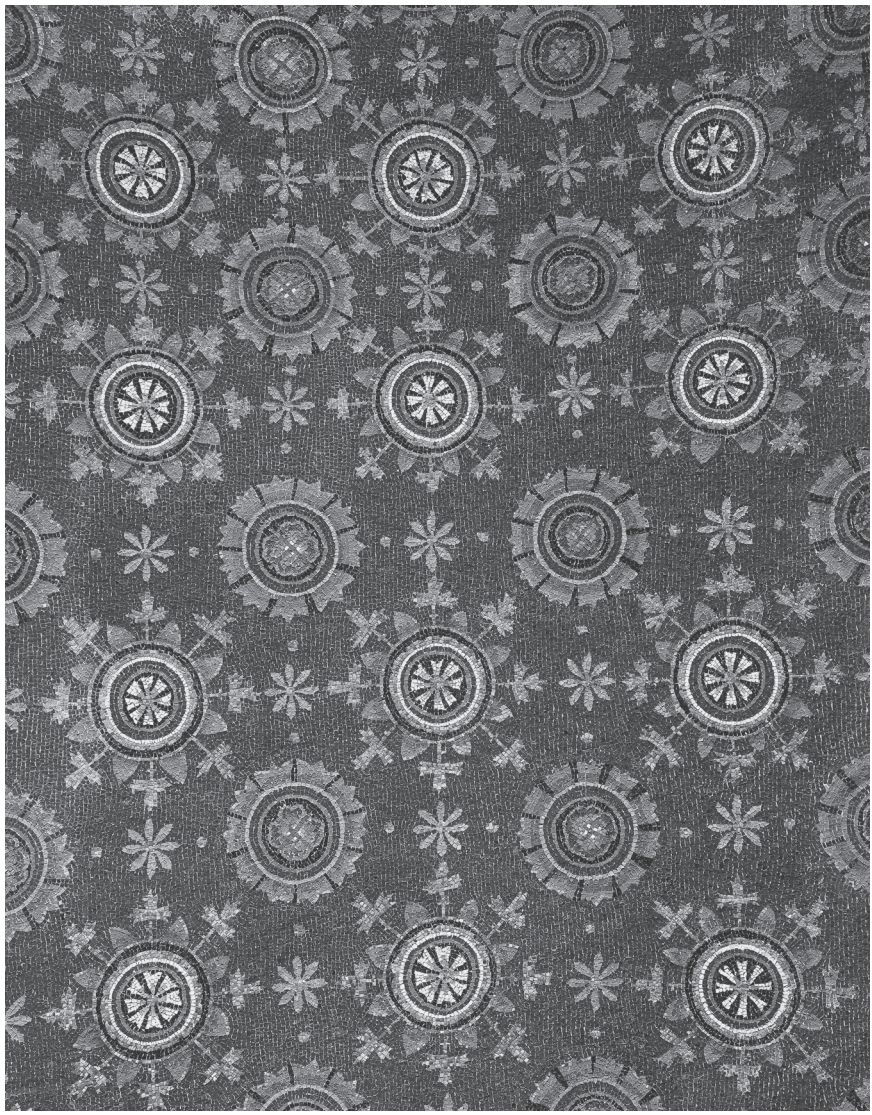

Figure 4.4 Detail from ceiling mosaic, first half of the fifth century. Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna.

he does not seem to have had a direct relationship.[50] Despite its many transformations (or disfigurations from the point of view the later Neoplatonists), his thought can be recognized as the most typical expression of a widespread sensibility, in the spirituality as well as the taste of an entire age.

5

The Paradoxes of Beauty

The emotions of love in Plotinus

A peculiar aspect of the late antique reflection on beauty is that, when related to beauty itself and to the sphere of the divine, the usual conceptions, and in particular the classical ones, are abandoned and instead a more complex approach to the issue is undertaken, as seen in the previous pages. In this chapter, another passage from Plotinus' first treatise deals with the oxymoronic nature of the emotions of love. An analogue theme, directly connected to the contemplation of God, can be seen in a text from Gregory of Nyssa's *Homilies on the Song of Songs*.

Both thinkers try to defy conventional language to express the reality of divine beauty and, in doing so, they alter the rules of linear thinking, opening new ways of relating to the highest levels of reality. In this respect, their influence on medieval mysticism, especially through the mediation of Augustine, is of great importance, but even more intriguing is their unwilling relation to modernity.

In *Enn.* I 6, 4 Plotinus refers to the πάθη related to the sphere of love. In doing this he adopts some terms which are linked to a conception of love as a mixture of pleasure and pain. This view, philosophically discussed by Plato, nevertheless goes back to the lyric poets who first identified the ambiguous nature of love. Plotinus describes the powerful emotions aroused by the sight of beauty. Beauty is Platonically the chief object of *eros*, and therefore these emotions can be classified as emotions of love. Plotinus thus belongs to a tradition, not strictly philosophical, which recognizes the contradictory and oxymoric nature of the πάθη related to love. The context of the passage concerns the contemplation of beauty: in order to perceive true beauty, that of justice and temperance for example, which is even higher than that of the most

luminous stars, it is necessary that the soul is able to contemplate. In this contemplation it feels much greater joy, wonder and emotion than in the presence of visible beauty; in fact: ταῦτα γὰρ δεῖ τὰ πάθη γενέσθαι περὶ τὸ ὅ τι ἂν ᾖ καλόν, θάμβος καὶ ἔκπληξιν ἡδεῖαν καὶ πόθον καὶ ἔρωτα καὶ πτόησιν μεθ' ἡδονῆς· 'it is necessary that these emotions arise with respect to what is beautiful: sweet amazement and wonder and longing and desire and upheaval with pleasure'.[1]

These emotions for Plotinus are therefore general and apply to both sensible and intelligible beauty, and if the soul does not experience them, it cannot begin its ascent to beauty in itself. What strikes in the list of πάθη in this passage is the mixed nature of them, linked on the one hand, as it is natural, to the sphere of the pleasant (the adjective ἡδεῖαν and the construct μεθ' ἡδονῆς), on the other hand related to feelings which are not pleasant in themselves or even painful (θάμβος, ἔκπληξιν, πτόησιν), while in the middle remains what is perhaps the emblem of this ambiguous condition of love, the πόθος. Francesco Romano, in a paper devoted to the analysis of *Enn*. VI 9 (9) 4 and *Enn*. III 5 (50) 1,[2] demonstrated that the antinomic structure of the πάθη of love remains constant in the thought of Plotinus. What Romano says about the passages he examines, where he observes situations of coincidence of opposites and almost oxymorons,[3] in relation to the doctrine of love, can also be said about the passage of the treatise on beauty. In *Enn*. V 5 (32) 12, 34 f., for example, the mixture of pleasure and pain, typical of the experience of beauty,[4] is expressed again, with some of the emotions indicated in the first treatise: with respect to the good, the beautiful θάμβος ἔχει καὶ ἔκπληξιν καὶ συμμιγῆ τῷ ἀλγύνοντι τὴν ἡδονήν. These words attest the persistence of this doctrine within the thought of Plotinus and refer, in some way, to the reflection in the *Philebus*[5] about the types of mixture of pleasure and pain, although in Plato's context the distinction aims to investigate the type of pleasure that theatrical performances bring,[6] and not what beauty in itself produces.

Beauty and *Eros*

The emotions arising at the sight of what is beautiful can certainly be regarded as pertaining to the realm of love, so that in Plotinus any discourse on the

beautiful should also be considered as a discourse on love and vice versa, although the conception of the beautiful presents some difficulties of interpretation. In particular, the problem arises in determining what the beautiful in itself is, whether a form, and therefore belonging to the sphere of the intellect or whether, in its identity with the good, it coincides with the One. This position is supported by Suzanne Stern-Gillet,[7] who thinks that it is undeniable that Plotinus, at least in *Enn*. VI 7 (38) 32 and 33, identifies One, Good and Beautiful. Rist believes, instead, that when Plotinus seems to attribute beauty to the One itself, it is in a figurative sense.[8] Certainly Plotinus presents contradictory expressions, because he denies that anything can be attributed to the One, but he also needs to explain why the One is the object of *eros* (as well as subject, as I will mention later). Since the One is the goal of the desire of love, it could be said that it produces attraction, but it is not clear what might produce this attraction, if not in beauty. In fact, when Plotinus talks about beauty in relation to the One, he either uses rare terms such as καλλονή[9] or metaphors such as καλοῦ ἄνθος,[10] which allow him to somehow avoid the difficulty. It is nevertheless clear that *eros* is aroused by beauty in all its forms and its degrees: τὸ καλὸν ἐράσμιον, the beautiful is the object of love, says Plotinus in *Enn*. V 8 (31) 9, 41. In *Enn*. III 5 (50) 1, 10 ff. this concept is also clearly expressed: a definition of love that is common to philosophers and non-philosophers qualifies it as a *pathos* of the soul that experiences the desire of being united with the beautiful in itself, although this is perceived in various forms.

Beauty as the chief object of *eros* is obviously central in the *Symposium*,[11] and is affirmed explicitly by Plotinus, both in *Enn.* III 5 (50), and in the earlier treatise I 6, where at the end of Chapter 4 he explains how all souls are able to experience these emotions although to a greater extent they are experienced by those who are ἐρωτικώτεραι;[12] similarly to what happens in respect of bodies, for which especially οἳ καὶ λέγονται ἐρᾶν feel the attraction. It seems then contradictory that *eros* is included in the list of *Enn.* 1 6, 4 along with other πάθη, which would be distinct from it, with the result that beauty would produce not only love, but also other different emotions, a prospect that in some ways would alter the Platonic spirit of the treatise. It could however be observed in this case that Plotinus often lacks attention to classificatory systems, as can be seen elsewhere – for example, in the first chapter of the

treatise on *eros*, where one can read not entirely consistent sequences of terms, with repetitions and uncertainties.[13] However, it seems that Plotinus means all the πάθη listed in the passage as expressions or variations of love for the beautiful, and probably, when the list uses the word *eros*, this could be understood more in the sense of ὄρεξις, a term which in effect he uses in *Enn*. III 5 (50) 1, 18, where he identifies the desire for beauty as the cause of the *eros* the soul feels.

The notion of *eros* in Plotinus, like that of beautiful, is complex and central in his thought, and this is why it could not be put on the same level as the other πάθη in the passage, which could be described as different connotations of the overall erotic experience. Plotinus' consideration of *eros* is wide and covers different aspects. In *Enn*. III 5 (50), *eros* is described in its features connected both to the human and the divine sphere, so that it can be classified according to its specific object, physical beauty (in its various meanings) and beauty in itself. Romano has also pointed out a transformation between the concept of ἐρωτικὸν πάθημα of *Enn*. VI 9 (9) 4, 18 and the definition of love as πάθος τι τῆς ψυχῆς in *Enn*. III 5 (50) 1, 1. An element of continuity, however, remains in the conception of *eros* as a prerogative of the soul. John Rist also explores the various meanings that the term has, attributing a form of *eros* even to the One itself,[14] and distinguishes two notions of *eros*, one related to acquisition and one to donation, seeking thereby to blur the differences between the Greek and the Christian concept of love.

More recently, Lacrosse sought to analyse in a systematic way Plotinus' erotic doctrine,[15] classifying three types of *eros*, one relating to the soul, one to the *nous* and one to the One. It is thus emphasized that the conversion produced by *eros* is not tied exclusively to man but, in its various forms, is the prerogative of the whole of reality.

It is clear that Plotinus' reflection of *Enn*. I 6 (1) 4, as that of *Enn*. III 5 (50) 1, falls within the soul's *eros*, and in this context it is interesting to see Plotinus' attention to the proper emotional aspect of the erotic experience, but the main element, already present in Plato, is the continuity between the emotions of love aroused by the beautiful, regardless of their specific object. Whether one observes a human body, or contemplates the stars, or considers the beautiful in itself, the soul feels the same πάθη and experiences the same emotional response.

Plotinus' doctrine of beauty, despite some difficulties, and his later reflections on *eros*, appear to be related, although expressed in different times. We can therefore now analyse each term of the passage of *Enn*. I 6, 4, trying to track down on which occasions they have been used in reference to the sphere of love, even if not in a strictly philosophical framework.

The fact that this list of πάθη is regarded by Plotinus as particularly significant seems to be supported by the fact that in Chapter 7 of the treatise he uses the same expressions to define the contact of the soul with beauty in itself, in a passage which, because of its centrality in Plotinus' thought, was the object of reflection for both Armstrong[16] and Rist.[17] In this passage the terms used before are repeated, but in the plural form (ἐρώτων, πόθους), as well as the antithetical constructs, this time with the variation of the use of verbs (ἐκπλαγείη μεθ' ἡδονῆς and θάμβους πίμπλασθαι again μεθ' ἡδονῆς).[18] It is therefore a doctrine of πάθη related to beauty which Plotinus repeats in the treatise, willing to bring out the complex nature of the emotions related to the sphere of love. Some of these terms, as seen before, are also reflected in *Enn*. V 5 (32) 12.

A list of emotions

It could be useful to consider each of the terms used by Plotinus in the sequence. The first is θάμβος, indicating amazement or astonishment, typically with respect to something divine or great, as attested by Homer,[19] who refers the emotion of θάμβος to those who see the prodigious acts of a god. In Plato the term is used in a particularly significant passage of the *Phaedrus*,[20] when the reaction of the soul to beauty is described,[21] and it seems likely that Plotinus was referring to this text, although Plato associates θάμβος and αἰσχύνη, while Plotinus' perspective is different. The use of the term in Pindar is also interesting for the analogy with Plotinus: in *Nem*. 1, 55 the emotion of θάμβος is described as a mixture of unpleasant and pleasant.[22] Finally Callimachus, in the fr. 42, 85 of his *Aitia*, refers to the θάμβος which he felt for the muse's masterly and eridute description of the foundation of the cities of Sicily. It is an astonished admiration that the poet actually intends to convey to the reader with respect to his art. Therefore what θάμβος typically expresses is awe, sometimes

accompanied by a sort of terror, in the presence of the divine, and in fact it is also the term, with the corresponding verb, which is used in this sense in the *Septuagint* translation of the Bible.[23] If the reference to the sphere of religious experience characterizes the primary use of the term, it is in any case not exclusive. It can also be noted that in *Enn*. V 5 (32) 12, which incorporates some of the concepts of *Enn*. I 6 (1) 4, beauty, love and θάμβος are also related.[24] Θάμβος is also linked to vision *Enn*. III in 8 (30) 11, 32, which confirms that it is a specific feature of the reflection on contemplation in Plotinus.

The second emotion in the passage is ἔκπληξις, with the adjective ἡδεῖαν which evidently complements and corrects it. Generally ἔκπληξις is a term which refers to a violent emotion, as in Plato,[25] and it is not used in relation to enjoyment,[26] even if the verb ἐκπλήσσω may indicate, associated with other terms, the strength of the emotion of love, as in the case of Aristophanes[27] and Euripides.[28] The verb is also used in Plotinus, with reference to the emotions of the lover,[29] while the noun is used in relation to beauty also in line 13 of the passage and in *Enn*. V 5 (32) 12, 35, but is also used to indicate an unpleasant emotion of disturbance.[30] This is a sign of the strong oxymoronic quality of Plotinus' choice to relate the term to the adjective which corrects its negative meaning.[31]

The third term on the list is πόθος, which indicates the desire for something distant or absent,[32] in particular for the object of love. In this respect it is used by the poets of the archaic period in the sense of erotic desire: Archilochus[33] and repeatedly Sappho,[34] who shows some predilection for it. *Pothos* is also personified and connected to Aphrodite, as can be seen in a Roman copy of a statue by Skopas.[35]

The term is used several times by Plato,[36] generally in relation to the sphere of love, and Plotinus also adopts it without additions, evidently because it fully expresses the nature the πάθη related to beauty. Because of the extensive use in the depiction of the erotic experience, it is not necessary to dwell on it. It can be simply pointed out that Plotinus uses it in association with ὁ θυραυλῶν ἔρως (a reference to Plato, *Symp.* 203c 3) in *Enn*. VI 5 (23) 10, 3 ff., and again in *Enn*. VI 7 (38) 31, 8 ff. and 34, 1 ff., in the context of the love felt by the soul.

It is not necessary to retrace a history of the use of ἔρως: as we have seen, Plotinus should have defined, more consistently, the emotions aroused by the vision of beauty as different aspects of one love.

The last term, πτόησις, again indicates a particularly strong emotional upheaval, and it is used by Plato in the *Symposium*[37] in a passage which Plotinus seems to depend on. The term does not have a meaning linked exclusively to the erotic sphere,[38] and this is proved by the fact that Plotinus somehow corrects it with the addition of μεθ' ἡδονῆς. The corresponding verb, πτο(ι)έω, apart from Homer and Hesiod, however, seems to have been privilegedly used in defining the erotic emotion, as for example επτόαισεν in Sappho's famous ode.[39] Plato too in *Phaed*. 68c 9 connects the verb to the sphere of amorous desires. In any case Plotinus, adding μεθ' ἡδονῆς, emphasizes that the πτόησις is not intended as pleasant in itself. In both the *Symposium* and *Enn*. I 6, 4 it is used with the similar construction of πτόησις [...] περὶ τὸ καλόν in Plato and περὶ τὸ ὅ τι ἂν ᾖ καλόν [...] πτόησις in Plotinus. It is possible that Plotinus in constructing the entire sentence has paraphrased Plato's text (considering that he does not use the term elsewhere),[40] integrating it, as seen before, with *Phaedr*. 254c. The result is that Plotinus higlights the character of vehemence of the experience of love and of the emotions related to it. He seems to have drawn on a suggestion already present in Plato, adding to it the mixture of pain and pleasure[41] which, in stressing the composite character of erotic emotion, increases its ability to apply both to the sensible and intelligible beauty.

After considering the meaning of the individual terms of πάθη indicated by Plotinus, one may wonder if their antinomical character and, in particular, the associations of feelings of fear and upset with more pleasant ones can be traced before Plotinus. That the experience of love brings with it some unpleasant emotions is a *topos* of lyric poetry (but also of epic poetry, if we consider Aphrodite's belt and the description of the different aspects of erotic desire in *Il.* 14, 214 ff.), and its influence can also be traced in the *Symposium*. In this sense it is possible to recall, of course, Sappho, both in the ode cited above, in which the experience of love has characters of mental and physical violence and upheaval, and in fr. 130 Voigt, which defines *eros* as γλυκύπικρον, with a curious oxymoric neologism that became popular in ancient literature and refers to the same mixed experience of pleasure and pain described by Plotinus.

The philosopher, therefore, in describing the characters of the emotions associated with love and in emphasizing their mixed character, is part of

a precise tradition following the example of Plato. The new element that emerges is the use of the pairs of opposites of noun and adjective or prepositional constructions, all highlighting the complex and contradictory experience of love but also its invariant configuration with respect to any degree of beauty.

Plotinus, by investigating the emotional aspect of love, takes into account a series of elements linked to its strength, if not its violence, giving them a certainly positive function. In emphasizing their composite character, he highlights the pleasantness of the attraction to the beautiful, which moves the soul in order to direct it to higher beauty. In the analysis of the strength of these emotions, Plotinus was well understood and followed by the Christians, who made the emotional response one of the characteristic elements of mysticism.[42] Marsilio Ficino too, in the *argumentum* of his commentary to Plotinus' treatise, outlines the powerful characteristics of the erotic experience of beauty.[43] Through the analysis of the terms he used to describe the πάθη of the soul in the experience of loving, it is possible to see that Plotinus follows Plato but also shows some parallels with the tradition that begins with the lyric monodic. It is not possible to detect a precise awareness in Plotinus of the special relation of these emotions to the poetry of the archaic era. However, if we consider the permanence of those that can be defined as traditional motives of classical culture, Plotinus can then be reconducted to them and his doctrine of contemplation can be seen as a specific stage of the Greek reflection on the psychology of love. In *Enn.* III 5 (50), *On Eros*, Plotinus offers an exemplar essay of Neoplatonic hermeneutics[44] of the main texts of Plato's discussion on love as well as the literary and mythological reflection on the action of love; thus it seems likely that even in listing the emotions produced by the beautiful, the philosopher had in mind various elements of the ancient and not strictly philosophical reflection on love.

The paradox of divine beauty

An analogue attention to the paradoxical and oxymoric nature of love and of the attraction to the divine can be seen in Gregory of Nyssa. In the homily VI of his commentary on the *Song of Songs*, one of his last works, composed

around 391, Gregory gives some unusual and paradoxical views on divine beauty. The author, in fact, commenting on verses 7–8 of Chapter III of the *Song* which describe King Solomon's litter, explains that this image is meant to illustrate a quality of the divine. The verses he is considering, in the *Septuagint* translation, depict Solomon's bed as surrounded by sixty strong men, girded with swords against the terrors (ἀπὸ θάμβους) of the night.[45] Commenting on these words, Gregory justifies, as elsewhere in the same work, the use of allegorical interpretation as necessary because of the contradictions in the text and in the whole biblical corpus. In his opinion the reference to armed guards defending the king's bed would be incongruous, but above all he identifies an anomaly in the fact that while in 1 Kings 7, 1–12 there is a detailed description of Solomon's palace but his bed is not mentioned; in the passage from the *Song* the royal bed is instead described extensively. Considering that the reader would be faced with a contradiction as well as an obscurity of the text, he believes that one should not interpret these verses historically, as if they were an account of the king's palace, since in this case similar expressions can be found in the other sacred texts specifically dedicated to the palace, but should look for a hidden meaning in them. It is therefore necessary, according to Gregory, to abandon the material meaning to delve into the spiritual, following his distinction of orders of reality, which is also reflected in the contrast between two types of exegesis.[46]

In the search for the hidden and spiritual meaning of the biblical verses, Gregory makes a statement which appears to be completely original. He believes that it is possible to find an explanation for the words of the Scripture:

> τίς οὖν ἐστιν ἡ διάνοια; ἔοικε τὸ θεῖον κάλλος ἐν τῷ φοβερῷ τὸ ἐράσμιον ἔχειν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐναντίων τῷ σωματικῷ κάλλει δεικνύμενον· ἐνταῦθα μὲν γὰρ ἑλκτικὸν εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν ἐστὶ τὸ προσηνὲς τῇ ὄψει καὶ μειλίχιον καὶ πάσης φοβερᾶς τε καὶ θυμώδους διαθέσεως κεχωρισμένον, τὸ δὲ ἀκήρατον κάλλος ἐκεῖνο ἡ φοβερά τε καὶ κατάπληκτος ἀνδρεία ἐστίν. ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ἡ ἐμπαθὴς καὶ ῥυπῶσα τῶν σωμάτων ἐπιθυμία τοῖς τῆς σαρκὸς μέλεσιν ἐγκαθημένη καθάπερ τι σύνταγμα λῃστρικὸν ἐνεδρεύει τὸν νοῦν καὶ αἰχμάλωτον ἄγει πολλάκις πρὸς τὸ ἑαυτῆς βούλημα συναρπάσασα, ἐχθρὸν δὲ τῷ θεῷ τὸ γινόμενον, [...] διὰ τοῦτο ἀκόλουθόν ἐστιν ἐκ τῶν ἐναντίων τῇ σωματικῇ ἐπιθυμίᾳ τὸν θεῖον ἔρωτα γίνεσθαι, ὥστε εἰ ταύτης καθηγεῖται ἔκλυσις καὶ

> ἄνεσις καὶ βλακώδης διάχυσις, ἐκεῖ τὴν ἐπίφοβόν τε καὶ κατάπληκτον ἀνδρείαν ὕλην τοῦ θείου ἔρωτος γίνεσθαι·
>
> What sense is that, then? It seems that the divine beauty evokes love because it is fearsome; it reveals itself as coming from elsewhere than any corporeal beauty. For here it is what is pleasant to the eye and gentle and set apart from any fierce or fearsome disposition that induces passionate desire in us, but that unsullied Beauty is a fearsome and terrible strength. For since the passionate and filthy lust for things bodily, which resides in the fleshy members like a band of robbers, lays snares for the intellect and frequently seizes it and carries it off captive to his own will, [. . .] on this account it is appropriate for a divine love and longing to originate out of what stands in opposition to corporeal desire, so that wherever feebleness and indulgence and lazy relaxation give rise to such desire, in that place a terrible and astonishing strength may become the stuff of divine love.[47]

As he often does, following the example of Origen, Gregory gives his interpretation in a prudent way (ἔοικε), but this specific exegesis is particularly striking and also consistent with his theology. If divine beauty is, in fact, incorporeal, it necessarily has different characteristics from bodily beauty: the latter attracts for its pleasantness, divine beauty, instead, attracts (since the ἐράσμιον is what characterizes beauty) by contrast, in producing φόβος.

Beauty, love and fear

Once the criteria of beauty according to Gregory's notion have been identified, the considerations contained in the homily VI of the *Commentary on the Song* can be better defined. Because divine beauty lies on a different level, higher than that of sensible objects, Gregory operates a transposition from a different plane to the opposite plane *tout court*, claiming a total alterity for the divine. For this reason, this beauty arouses the relevant ἔρως by means of opposite characteristics to those of the sensible bodies.

Gregory, inspired by an exegetical difficulty related to the verses that he is commenting on, cannot explain why in the context of a love song there

is room for a military description, with weapons and references to the fears of the night. With a certain exegetical boldness, disguised by declarations of caution and humility, and taking a cue from this difficulty, Gregory develops a doctrine that is consistent with his theological thought, and in addition is completely original in the context of ancient thought. It is consistent because, given that divine beauty does not reside in any of the bodily qualities, even the ἔρως it arouses must necessarily be different from, and opposite to, the one produced by sensible beauty. Therefore, while the source of attraction of physical beauty is the pleasure of the senses, by contrast, divine beauty contains a principle of pleasure not, so to speak, soft and feminine, but terrible and manly. The apparent paradox of a kind of ἔρως produced by φόβος is actually to be understood as the fascination of the divine, as the amazement of the soul contemplating the divine immensity, with fear and at the same attraction. It is intriguing to note that this conception presents analogies, although of course we cannot assume any influence, with the description of the effects of the great and the terrible mentioned by Kant in his *Critique of Judgement*.[48]

Is it possible to trace some antecedents, in the ancient world, for this theory? Certainly φόβος was considered well before Gregory as one of the effects produced on mortals by the vision or presence of the divine. However, that fear or awe could be associated with beauty and produce a somehow aesthetic value is a consideration that can be found only in the debate on some literary forms, but fear was never qualified as ἐράσμιον.

Before investigating the Greek tradition it might be useful to see the presence of fear and its possible links with love in the biblical tradition, since this is the starting point of Gregory's observations. The theme of the fear of God is certainly present in the sacred texts, through different expressions, which in the Greek of the *Septuagint* and in the New Testament are conveyed mostly with φόβος, φοβέομαι and their derivatives. The different meanings of these terms can be reduced roughly to two areas: on one hand that of fear and terror as emotional reactions of man before the terrible works of God, on the other that of the obedient adhesion to the divine will, independent from immediate psychological reactions. Related to the first type are the passages about theophanies, both in the Old Testament[49] and in the New, where the theme of the φόβος of man for the divine is

characteristic in the Gospels – in the stories of Jesus' childhood,[50] recurrently in the testimonies of miraculous events,[51] in the accounts of the transfiguration[52] as well as of the death and resurrection.[53] As for the other meaning, that of reverent awe as obedience to divine laws, it appears later in the biblical texts and, when present in the New Testament,[54] it seems to be linked to the Jewish tradition. In this regard, it is possible to see a tension, not always resolved, between the enthusiasm arising from the spiritual experience of trusting love in the relationship with the divine, and the persistence of traditional themes and stereotyped formulas related to fear and the subsequent submission, among which Paul's hendiadys φόβος καὶ τρόμος stands out for its strength.[55] On the opposite side of this dialectic, particularly clear is 1 John 4, 17, which states that φόβος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ, where the contrast of the two terms of love and fear establishes the superiority of the former. Gregory, who as an exegete was well aware of the various ways in which the fear of God is used in the Bible, in the passage of the *Commentary on the Song* obviously refers to the fear associated with the divine epiphany but, identifying it as the reason for the attraction to God, does not seem to recall, in this context, the teaching of John's first letter. This could be due, in part, to its conception of love for God as ἔρως, linked to the teaching of Origen and the Platonic tradition, rather than as ἀγάπη, although the two terms in his thought tend to coincide.

As for the Greek tradition, some thinkers could show a convergence with Gregory's reflection. As we mentioned in the Introduction, Aristotle, talking about the role of μίμησις in tragedy, argues that in it pleasure is produced is by means of φόβος as well as ἔλεος,[56] elements which Plato had identified in the *Philebus* as part of the aesthetic experience;[57] φόβος and ἔλεος are also included as elements of the κάθαρσις in Aristotle's famous and debated passage[58] on the effect of tragedy. Despite the difficulties of our understanding of the text, it is clear that the connection between the spectator/reader and the work of art finds its own defining characteristics in the inner reaction at the events represented. There is therefore a pleasant and aesthetic character of φόβος, but it refers to a form of purely poetic and artistic beauty, and most importantly linked only to the very specific literary genre of tragedy: it is not a universal character. Therefore, apart from the question of how much Gregory knew of Aristotle (whom he quotes

seldom, but only in general terms and criticizing his excessive subtlety as mere verbosity)[59] and his *Poetics*, theirs are different conceptions, although they share the common intuition of φόβος as a possible source of something pleasant.

Another author who could be considered similar to Gregory in the conception of a beauty that possesses also an element of terror is the anonymous author of the treatise *On the Sublime*. The example that could be cited is probably the most famous of this treatise, where the author appreciates the Homeric and biblical representations of the divine power as convincing examples of the sublime style.[60] The author of the *Sublime* is also faced with the difficulty of interpreting the Homeric text and resolutely declares the need for allegorical exegesis to avoid any form of anthropomorphism. Leaving aside the many problems of attribution of the treatise and, therefore, of its dating, it appears that Christians and pagans share a common need for a suitable exegesis of the most theologically significant texts. The aim of this interpretation is to find a way to reconcile the archaic view of the divine with the more philosophically elaborated conception. The author of the *Sublime*, from the description of a theomachy[61] – in need of interpretation to avoid falling into blasphemy[62] – switches to another quote from Homer,[63] in which the divine is described with the proper attributes of greatness and perfection. The latter passage is judged superior[64] for the consonance between description and reality.

In this context, it is worth recalling Proclus' position,[65] who proposes the adoption of the allegorical interpretation of the poetic myths,[66] particularly when the divine is described in a manner which is not proper, or even contrary to its true nature.[67] According to the Neoplatonist, in this case the intent of the ancient writers was to elevate the soul of the reader (or listener), through the effort of a deeper understanding, beyond the evidence of the literal sense.[68]

This position has its roots in the same exegetical difficulty that Gregory of Nyssa had, although applied to different texts. Proclus, however, states that the indecorous myths show the contrary to the divine nature in order to stimulate the soul, while for Gregory it is divine beauty that is opposite to sensible beauty. It is a considerable difference. Their solutions therefore are not comparable, but it is nevertheless worth noting that – despite all

the differences – the proximity of the two positions reiterates the analogy of conclusions between pagans and Christians within a Platonic conception. This is evidenced in particular by the reprise of Proclus' doctrine about the interpretation of symbols by the Ps. Dionysius and, through him, by John Scotus Eriugena.[69]

As for the passage from the treatise *On the Sublime*, if we consider the quotations from Homer and the Book of Genesis, it emerges that what is praised is the ability of the writers to convey the fascination produced by the divine presence on man, who is bewildered by the confrontation with a reality which is infinitely superior to him in power. Here, despite the fact that in the treatise the issue concerns only literary aesthetics, the proximity to Gregory's doctrine is greater than in Aristotle, and one would wonder if the Bishop of Nyssa, specifically trained in rhetoric by his father, actually had direct or indirect knowledge of the ideas about sublimity expressed in the treatise. It would be likely that, faced with the difficulty of reconciling the description of the verses of the *Song* with the general theme of spiritual desire, Gregory had somehow recalled some features of the divine that were present both in the biblical tradition and in the Greek poets. It is in any case clear that, instead of a purely aesthetic pleasure that could be produced from φόβος, Gregory writes of a real desire, which relates not to an artistic production but to God in his infinity. This is an original intuition of Gregory and it anticipates Kant's position in a deeper way than the anonymous author of the *Sublime*, who is generally recognized as the precursor of the Prussian philosopher's aesthetics.[70]

As seen before, in *Enn.* I 6, 4, Plotinus lists the πάθη which beauty produces in the soul: θάμβος, ἔκπληξιν, πόθον, ἔρωτα and πτόησιν. The first, the second and the last of these terms draw attention for their being closer to the realm of fear than that of love, and therefore Plotinus' conception could be considered as a possible source of inspiration for Gregory. These terms, however, are integrated by Plotinus in order to mitigate their drastic nature: in fact he calls ἡδεῖαν the ἔκπληξιν and adds μεθ'ἡδονῆς to πτόησιν, creating a sort of oxymoron to connect the dimension of the pleasant to those emotions which apparently seem unrelated to the vocabulary of love. Gregory of Nyssa instead thematizes this estrangement, arguing that between love for sensible beauty and love for intelligible beauty there is a complete separation, so that one

arouses emotions which are opposite to the other. Plotinus' and Gregory's conceptions, therefore, differ considerably.

From this analysis, it seems that Gregory, faced with the difficulty of harmonizing the biblical passage with the theme of love, solved the aporia in an original way, affirming that all divine attributes are objects of desire, even those that in sensible beings would not cause attraction but aversion. Among these attributes, in particular, is the terribleness of God, his being infinitely superior to man, which necessarily causes perturbation in the soul, without however driving it away but on the contrary intensifying its love for such a high reality.

Because divine beauty is incorporeal, its attraction acts on a different level than sensible beauty, a level that Gregory considers simply opposite. In it, what is attractive from the material point of view loses its charm, while what causes aversion and terrifies, on the contrary, becomes attractive. In this doctrine Gregory is completely original, and it seems impossible to find a close equivalent for his position, either in biblical writings or in pagan thinkers before him, not even in those who, like Aristotle and the anonymous author of the *Sublime*, had identified a connection between aesthetic experience and φόβος but considered it within the effects of artistic production. Among the Neoplatonists, despite certain intersections between Gregory and the thought of Plotinus, it could only be observed that Proclus' attitude towards the Homeric text assumes characteristics, related to the exegetical difficulties, which are similar to those of Gregory with respect to the sacred text.

The autonomy of Gregory's position seems a further testament to his theoretical value, despite the fact that he prudently introduces his doctrines in a very cautious way. In fact, he boldly connects two elements linked to the experience of the divine, both present in the Greek tradition: the terribleness, widely attested already in Homer (and indeed a common feature of the religious sentiment of all cultures, including that of the Bible) and the attraction for the beautiful, of specifically Platonic tradition, in its application to the world of ideas and to the divine. Gregory's combination of two fundamental but somewhat contradictory elements appears to be an attempt to reconcile different elements of the tradition, but at the same time opens new perspectives completely unthinkable in classical thought. Aside from the analogy with Kant's aesthetic doctrine, Gregory's solution presents

characteristics that cannot be related entirely to the Greek horizon. In this case it is not a form of negative theology, although very close to it, but a kind of theology, so to speak, of the contrary. The form of the enunciation is paradoxical: God attracts by being fearsome. Its gist refers to a religious and cultural dimension far removed from the classical one. Its philosophical legacy, surprisingly, reaches modernity.

Conclusion
Aesthetics and the Ineffable Beauty

The scope of this book has been to highlight some themes of aesthetic reflection in late antiquity and specifically the third and fourth centuries, focusing on the thought of Plotinus and Gregory of Nyssa. By connecting their conceptions to the philosophical tradition of antiquity, it was possible to detect the innovative elements of their views on beauty and art.

The interconnection between philosophy and art was the subject of the Introduction, where the imperial portraits of the third century were interpreted as an appropriate visual commentary on the thought of the time. The emergence of a distinctive sensibility for the anxieties of the soul and for the promise of its immortality contrasts with the aspirational classicism of the Gallienic Renaissance. Plotinus' reflection on the activity of the artist was compared with Plato's rejection of mimetical art and Aristotle's discussion on tragic poetry. In this context we also considered the possibility of research on aesthetic issues in late antiquity and the importance of studying Christian thought alongside pagan philosophy.

The first chapter was devoted to the interplay between rhetorical expression and philosophy in Plotinus. His use of metaphors linked to artistic and poetic production was studied in its relationship with the contents of his thought, especially in the metaphor of the theatre. The influence of Neoplatonism on Gregory of Nyssa was discussed in the second chapter together with his rhetorical and philosophical education and his views on art and beauty.

The adoption of a specific metaphor and its legacy among later thinkers was one of the subjects of the third chapter. Sculpting one's own soul is the image that Plotinus adopts in his treatise on beauty in order to express the need to purify the soul from the external elements which disturb its ascent to the intelligible forms. Gregory of Nyssa, who knew and admired Plotinus' first treatise, in *De opificio hominis* uses an analogue metaphor of sculpting, relating

it to the process of assimilation to God. If the act of sculpting offered a convincing metaphor for the necessity of catharsis, painting was instead considered in its actual and practical use, which was justified by Basil and his brother Gregory for its didactic value. The silent communication of pictures, in the Cappadocians' view, is as powerful as historic narration.

The fourth chapter was more closely related to the influence that philosophical reflection had on the art of the time. Plotinus' criticism of the classical theory of beauty as deriving from good and harmonious proportion lies in the discussion on the reason for which uncompounded beings, like light and gold, are beautiful. Plotinus' theory was reprised by both Basil and Gregory of Nyssa and seems to be parallel to the late antique taste for the effects of light and gold in artistic production.

Inevitably, the Neoplatonic reflection on beauty is not interested as much in the value of arts as in the contemplation of divine reality, which it considers to be the only source of true beauty and the final scope of the desire of the soul. In the last chapter, through analysis of the emotions of love in Plotinus, it was possible to grasp the emotional response of the soul to beauty and its divine source. The paradoxical characteristics of these emotions were considered to be reinforced in Gregory of Nyssa's view on divine beauty, which attracts by producing fear in contrast to the allurement of sensual beings.

It has been stressed throughout this volume that it is not possible to detect precisely a direct influence of Plotinus' thought on late antique art, but at the same time examples of late antique artistic production have been suggested as parallels to the philosopher's aesthetic reflections. In this context, the complex and polyvalent aspects of beauty are reflected in the different forms of artistic expression.

Illumination and astonishment, conversion and aversion, return to the divine source and the feeling of being estranged from it, are the conflicting features of late antique awareness. The inability of the material world to convey the intelligible constitutes the element, derived from Platonic philosophy, which typifies late antique considerations on beauty, together with the theme of *eros* as attraction for the divine. The aesthetic reflection, in a way that mirrors the spiritual needs of the age, ends up highlighting the ineffectiveness of logical discourse in expressing the experience of the soul in its search for the divine. The metamorphosis of the classical world is condensed in the doleful gaze of the portrait of an empress.

Notes

Introduction

1 Cf. Susan Elliott Wood, *Roman Portrait Sculpture, 217–260 AD: The Transformation of an Artistic Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), pp. 89–91.
2 Cf. J.D. Breckenridge, *Likeness: A Conceptual History of Ancient Portraiture* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 214.
3 Cf. J. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 6–12.
4 Cf. F. Romano, *Il Neoplatonismo* (Roma: Carocci, 1998), pp. 29–41.
5 For Gallienus' cultural policies, see J.J. Bray, *Gallienus: A Study in Reformist and Sexual Politics* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 1996), pp. 231–249.
6 The inspiration seems to be derived from the type of the so-called Venus Genitrix, devised perhaps by the sculptor Callimachus at the end of the fifth century BC, although the portrait is more demure.
7 I borrow the term from E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).
8 Cf. J. Pépin, 'L'épisode du portrait de Plotin', in L. Brisson et al. (eds), *Porphyre. La Vie de Plotin* (Paris: Vrin, 1992), pp. 301–334.
9 It was common costume to display portraits of illustrious philosophers: see Brisson, note to I.6 in *Porphyre. La Vie de Plotin*, cit., pp. 194–197.
10 Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 1, 7–10; trans. by A.H. Armstrong.
11 Cf. H.P. L'Orange, 'The portrait of Plotinus', *Cahiers Archéologiques* V (1951), pp. 15–30.
12 For the supposed disease of the sitter, see the entry 32 by D. Arnold and D.T. Mininberg in J.P. Allen, *The Art of Medicine in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 37ff.
13 Cf. J. Pépin, 'L'épisode du portrait de Plotin', cit., pp. 323–325.
14 Cf. Paulin. Nol., *Ep.* XXX 2.
15 *Vita Theodori*, 139.
16 Cf. R. Cormack, *Writing in Gold: Byzantine Society and Its Icons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 39.

17 Cf. J.D. Breckenridge, 'Apocrypha of Early Christian Portraiture', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 67 (1974), pp. 101–109.
18 Cf. A. Samellas, *Death in the Eastern Mediterranean (50–600 AD): The Christianization of the East: An Interpretation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), pp. 136–138.
19 For a general overview of the complex issue of Plato's view of poetic imitation and inspiration, see for example P. Murray, *Plato on Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1–32.
20 Cf. M. Migliori, *Il Disordine ordinato. La filosofia dialettica di Platone. Vol. II – Dall'anima alla prassi etica e politica* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2013), pp. 725–858.
21 Arist., *Poet*. 9.2, 1451b.
22 For a complete review of the different interpretations, ancient and modern, of Aristotle's passage, cf. P. Destrée, 'La catharsis tragique à l'épreuve de Philodème et des Néoplatoniciens', in D. Iozzia (ed.), *Philosophy and Art in Late Antiquity. Proceedings of the International Seminar of Catania, 8–9 November 2012* (Catania: Bonanno, 2013), pp. 91–113.
23 Cf. J. Pigeaud, *L'art et le vivant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), pp. 58–59.
24 Plato, *Ion* 534c-d (transl. by A. Sheppard).
25 Idem, *Phaedr*. 245a (transl. by A. Sheppard).
26 A. Sheppard and O. Bychkov (eds), *Greek and Roman Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. xii.
27 Cf. S. Stern-Gillet, 'Neoplatonist Aesthetics', in P. Smith and C. Wilde (eds), *A Companion to Art Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 44.
28 Cf. M. Formisano, 'Towards an Aesthetic Paradigm of Late Antiquity', in *Antiquité tardive* 15 (2007), pp. 277–284.
29 For the many issues about the different ways of intepreting the relationship between Neoplatonism and Christian thought, see M. Di Pasquale Barbanti and C. Martello (eds), *Neoplatonismo pagano vs. neoplatonismo cristiano. Identità e differenze* (Catania: CUECM, 2006). See also C. Steel, 'De-paganizing Philosophy', in C.G. Steel, J. Marenbon and W. Verbeke (eds), *Paganism in the Middle Ages: Threat and Fascination* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), pp. 19–37; and, for a general overview, the papers in D.J. O'Meara (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982).
30 L.P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
31 D. Iozzia, *Filosofia emendata. Elementi connessi col Neoplatonismo nell'esegesi esamerale di Gregorio di Nissa* (Acireale-Roma: Bonanno, 2006).

Chapter 1

1 Cf. M. Di Pasquale Barbanti, *La metafora in Plotino* (Catania: Bonanno, 1981), p. 14.
2 Cf. S. Leclercq, *Plotin et l'expression de l'image* (Paris: Sils Maria, 2005), pp. 7–12.
3 Cf. R. Ferwerda, *La signification des les images et des métaphores dans la pensée de Plotin* (Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1965), p. 139.
4 M. Di Pasquale Barbanti, *La metafora in Plotino*, cit. p. 14 (my translation), with a reference to M. Black, *Models and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1962), p. 28s.
5 Cf. Arist., *Poet*. 1457b.
6 Cf. idem, *Rhet*. 1404b; 1410b–1411b.
7 Cf. J. Derrida, 'Littérature et philosophie mêlées', in *Poétique* 21 (1975), p. 7, reprinted as 'Le Facteur de la vérité' in *La Carte postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980).
8 Cf. M. Di Pasquale Barbanti, *La metafora in Plotino*, cit., p. 40.
9 Cf. R. Ferwerda, *La signification des les images*, cit., pp. 139–148.
10 For a discussion on Aristotle's concepts of *entelecheia* and *energeia*, see G.R. Giardina, *I Fondamenti della Fisica. Analisi critica di Aristotele,* Phys. *I* (Catania: CUECM, 2003), pp. 26–30. For a list of all Plotinus' passages concerning the image of the statue and its material, see R. Ferwerda, *La signification des les images*, cit., p. 141ff.
11 See Cicero, *Orator* 8–9: *Nec vero ille artifex cum faceret Iovis formam aut Minervae, contemplabatur aliquem e quo similitudinem duceret, sed ipsius in mente insidebat species pulchritudinis eximia quaedam, quam intuens in eaque defixus ad illius similitudinem artem et manum dirigebat*; see also Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* 10, 8: *Non vidit Phidias Iovem, fecit tamen velut tonantem, nec stetit ante oculos eius Minerva; dignus tamen illa arte animus et concepit deos et exhibuit*. Cf. also Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, 6.19.
12 Cf. M. Fattal, *Plotin face à Platon* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), pp. 31–51.
13 The excellence of Phidias' art is a commonplace in Hellenistic and late antique rhetoric: see J.I. Porter, *The Origins of Aesthetic Thought in Ancient Greece: Matter, Sensation, and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 408–415. See also V.J. Platt, *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) pp. 224–235.
14 Plot., *Enn*. V 8 1, 32–36.

15 See O. Kuisma, *Art or Experience: A Study on Plotinus' Aesthetics* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 2003), pp. 111–130.

16 Proclus, *Comm. On the Timaeus* 1, 265.18–26. So too Phidias who made the statue of Zeus did not look at something that had come to be but arrived at a notion of the Homeric Zeus. If he had actually been able to reach the intellectual god himself, clearly his own work would have been a finer achievement. Beauty, or the lack of it, comes to the image from the model, likeness or unlikeness to the archetype comes from the sculptor. 'Image' is used of both, both the copy of the model and the work and product of the sculptor (transl. by A. Sheppard).

17 Cf. A. Sheppard, *The Poetics of Phantasia: Imagination in Ancient Aesthetics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 58–67.

18 Cf. O. Kuisma, *Art or Experience*, cit., pp. 120–122.

19 Cf. D. O'Brien, 'Comment écrivait Plotin? Étude sur la *Vie de Plotin* 8.1–4', in L. Brisson *et al.* (eds), *Porphyry. Vie de Plotin* I (Paris: Vrin, 1982), pp. 331–367.

20 For a discussion of the ancient rhetors' as well as philosophers' views on art, see Maria Michela Sassi, 'Critica dell'arte', in *Enciclopedia dell'arte antica, classica ed orientale*, sec. suppl. vol. II (Roma: Treccani, 1994), pp. 327–331.

21 Cf. J.-M. Narbonne, 'Introduction' a *Plotin. Traité 1 (I 6), Sur le Beau*, ed. by M. Achard, L. Ferroni, J.-M. Narbonne (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2012), pp. XCI–XCV.

22 Cf. A. Stavru, 'Socrate: la *kalokagathia* del filosofo', in idem, *Il potere dell'apparenza. Percorso storico-critico nell'estetica antica* (Napoli: Loffredo, 2011), pp. 99–129.

23 For all Plotinus' texts I use the translation by A.H. Armstrong. For a comment to the passage, see Plotinus, *Ennead* II 9 [33] *'Against the Gnostics', A Commentary,* ed. by N. Spanu (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), p. 198.

24 For Plotinus' use of music in metaphors and the influence of Pythagorean understanding of music on him, see S. Gersh, 'Plotinus on harmonia. Musical metaphors and their uses in the Enneads,' in J. Dillon and M. Dixsaut (eds), *Agonistes. Essays in Honour of Denis O'Brien* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 195–207.

25 Plot., *Enn.* II 9 (33) 4, 14: Γελοῖον γὰρ τὸ ἵνα τιμῷτο, καὶ μεταφερόντων ἀπὸ τῶν ἀγαλματοποιῶν τῶν ἐνταῦθα.

26 It is not clear which specific forms of theatre, apart from dance and pantomine, Plotinus could attend in his age. It is therefore possible that in his metaphor he considered literary sources: cf. V. Cilento, 'Tracce di dramma e di mito nelle *Enneadi* di Plotino', in *Dioniso* 43 (1969), pp. 291–292 (repr. in idem, *Saggi su Plotino* (Milano: Mursia, 1973), pp. 241–254).

27 Cf. Seneca, *Ep*. 76, 31; 77, 20.
28 Cf. Epictetus, *Diatr*. I 29, 41; see F. Decleva Caizzi, 'La tradizione antistenico-cinica in Epitteto', in G. Giannantoni (ed.), *Scuole socratiche minori e filosofia ellenistica* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1977), pp. 93–113.
29 Cf. Marcus Aurelius, XII 36.
30 Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math*. VII 88.
31 Oenomaus of Gadara, Γοήτων φώρα, fr. 16 Hammerstaedt (=Eusebius, *Praep. ev*. VI 7, 31–4); see A. Brancacci, 'Libertà e fato in Enomao di Gadara', in idem (ed.), *La filosofia in età imperiale. Le scuole e le tradizioni filosofiche* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2000), pp. 37–67.
32 Cf. M. Di Pasquale Barbanti, *La metafora in Plotino*, cit., pp. 98–100.
33 For a full discussion of the problem of freedom in Plotinus, see E. Eliasson, *The Notion of That Which Depends on Us in Plotinus and Its Background* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2008).
34 Plotinus' attention to the importance of the actor differs from Aristotle, who only seldom mentions it (*Poet*. 1449a 15–19; 1449b 4–6; 1456a 25–26; 1451b 36–38; 1462a 5–6): cf. A. Longo, 'L'arte e il teatro per spiegare il mondo: Plot., *Enn*. III, 2,' in *Studi classici orientali* XLVII.3 (2001) (repr. in ead., *Amicus Plato: métaphysique, langue, art, éducation dans la tradition platonicienne de l'Antiquité tardive: Plotin, Théodore d'Asiné, Syrianus, Hermias, Proclus, Damascius, Augustin* (Milano: Mimesis, 2007), pp. 15–38), p. 514s. n. 22.
35 Cf. Plot., *Enn*. III 2, 17, 27–28.
36 Cf. ibid. 17, 21.
37 Cf. ibid. 17, 33–36.

Chapter 2

1 Traditionally, the champions of these opposite positions are Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria. On the latter, see cf. S. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
2 Cf. Act. Apost. 17, 22–34.
3 Cf. ibid. 14, 8–18.
4 Cf. S. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, cit., pp. 209–211.
5 An excellent overview of the Platonic elements in the Christian Fathers can be read in S. Lilla, 'Platonismo e i Padri', in *Dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane*, vol. II (Roma: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1983), coll.

2818–2858. For the general attitude of Christianity towards philosophy, see A. Meredith, *Christian Philosophy in the Early Church* (London-New York: T&T Clark, 2012).

6 Cf. R. Arnou, 'Platonisme des Péres', in *Dictionnaire de Théologie catholique*, XII 2 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1935), coll. 2258–2391.

7 Cf. E. von Ivánka, *Plato Christianus. Übernahme und Umgestaltung des Platonismus durch die Väter* (Einsieldeln: Johannes Verlag, 1964).

8 For a valuation of the influence of the pagan culture on Origen, see M. Di Pasquale Barbanti, *Origene di Alessandria tra Platonismo e Sacra Scrittura. Teologia e Antropologia del* De Principiis (Catania: CUECM, 2003), pp. 61–100.

9 For the relationship between Platonism and Christian thought from 270 to 355, see J. Rist, 'Basil's "Neoplatonism": Its Background and Nature', in P.J. Fedwick (ed.), *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic. A Sixteen-Hundreth Symposium* I (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1981), pp. 137–190 (repr. in J. Rist, *Platonism and its Christian Heritage* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), cap. XII).

10 Cf. J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique. Doctrine spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Aubier, 1944); H. Merki, *ΟΜΟΙΩΣΙΣ ΘΕΩΙ. Von der platonischen Angleichung an Gott zur Gottänlichkeit bei Gregor von Nyssa* (Freiburg in der Schweiz: Paulusdruckerei, 1952); D.L. Balás, *Metousia Theou: Man's Participation in God's Perfections According to St. Gregory of Nyssa* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto San Anselmo, 1966).

11 Cf. H. Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1930); H. Dörrie, *Gregors Theologie auf dem Hintergrund der neuplatonischen Metaphysik*, in H. Dörrie, M. Altenburger and U. Schramm (eds), *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie. Zweites Internationales Kolloquium über Gregor von Nyssa (18–23 Sept. 1972)*, (Leiden: Brill, 1976), pp. 21–42.

12 Cf. P. Merlan, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1953). See also the position of L.P. Gerson, *From Plato to Platonism* (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 2013).

13 Cf. F. Romano, *Il Neoplatonismo*, cit., pp. 29–41. For a detailed analysis of the general characters of Neoplatonism, see A.C. Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

14 Cf. H.D. Saffrey, 'La théologie platonicienne de Proclus, fruit de l'exégèse du Parménide', in *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 116 (1984), pp. 1–12 (repr. in idem, *Recherches sur le néoplatonisme après Plotin* (Paris: Vrin, 1990), pp. 173–184).

15 Cf. Orig., *Contra Celsum* VI, 64; ibid. VII, 38.

16 Cf. Greg. Nyss., *De perfectione christiana*, *GNO* VIII/1, p. 188, 15–16.

17 Cf. id., *In Canticum Canticorum* V, *GNO* VI, p. 157, 15.
18 Cf. id., *In Ecclesiasten* VII, *GNO* V, p. 425, 8–13. For all the passages, see S. Lilla, 'Il Platonismo e i Padri', cit., col. 2840.
19 Cf. Greg. Nyss., *In Canticum Canticorum* V, *GNO* VI, p. 157, 16–19.
20 For an overview of Gregory's early life, see M. Abineau, 'Introduction' to Grégoire de Nysse, *Traité de la Verginité* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1966), pp. 29–82.
21 A decription of the cultural life in Cappadocia and its archaeological evidence is given in M. Cassia, *Cappadocia romana: strutture urbane e strutture agrarie alla periferia dell'Impero* (Catania: Prisma, 2003), pp. 338–367.
22 J. Daniélou, 'Le mariage de Grégoire de Nysse et la chronologie de sa vie', in *Revue des études Augustiniennes* II (1956), pp. 71–78
23 Cf. e.g. Greg. Nyss., *De opificio hominis*, *PG* 44, 125, 24–30.
24 Cf. id., *Ep*. XIII, *GNO* VIII/2, ed. G. Pasquali, pp. 44, 12–46, 12.
25 For details of the history of his family, cf. id., *In Basilium fratrem*, GNO X/1, pp. 109–134.
26 Cf. id., *Vita Macrinae*, *GNO* VIII/1, pp. 370–414.
27 Cf. J.E. Pfister, 'A Biographical Note: The Brothers and Sisters of St. Gregory of Nyssa', in *Vigiliae Christianae* 18 (1964), pp. 108–113; M. Abineau, 'Introduction', cit., pp. 35–37 and n. 6; P. Maraval, 'Encore les frères et soeurs de Grégoire de Nysse', in *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 60 (1980), pp. 161–166.
28 Cf. Greg. Nyss., *Vita Macrinae*, *GNO* VIII/1, p. 378, 12–15.
29 Cfr. ibid., p. 371, 4; p. 376, 19; p. 393, 9.
30 Cf. J. Daniélou, 'La chronologie des œvres de Grégoire de Nysse', in *Studia Patristica* VII (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1966), pp. 159–169; G. May, 'Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregor von Nyssa', in M. Harl (ed.), *Écriture et culture philosophique dans le pensée de Grégoire de Nysse. Actes du colloque de Chevetogne (22–26 Septembre 1969)*, (Leiden: Brill, 1971), pp. 51–66.
31 For a complete list, see H. Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa*, cit., pp. 5–9.
32 See for example the cautious remarks of J. Rist, 'Plotinus and Christian Philosophy', in L.P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 399–401.
33 On Nemesius' work see B. Motta, 'Nemesius of Emesa', in L.P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, cit., pp. 509–519.
34 See E. Peroli, 'Gregory of Nyssa and the Neoplatonic doctrine of the Soul', in *Vigiliae Christianae* 51 (1997), pp. 117–139; P. Courcelle, 'Grégoire de Nysse lecteur de Porphyre', in *Revue des études grecques*, 80 (1967), pp. 402–406.
35 Cf. *De virg.* 10, 2, 15–25, p. 376, ed. Aubineau.
36 Cf. Plato, *Symp.* 201a.

37 Cf. ibid. 211c.

38 Cf. ibid. 204e, where Diotima proposes to exchance the terms.

39 For Plotinus, cf. A. Meredith, 'The Good and the Beautiful in Gregory of Nyssa', in H. Eisenberger (ed.), *Hermeneumata. Festschrift für H. Hörner* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1990), pp. 133–145.

40 See M. Simonetti, 'Introduzione' to Origene, *Il Cantico dei Cantici* (Milano: Lorenzo Valla, 1998), pp. XIII–XXIV.

41 Cf. *In Cant.* 1, 17, 7–12.

42 Cf. *In Cant.* 3, 85, 15–86, 2; 12, 357, 10–15; 13, 383, 6–8.

43 Cf. ibid. 12, 369, 15–370, 3. It is the notion of *epektasis*: see E. Ferguson, 'God's Infinity and Man's Mutability. Perpetual Progress According to Gregory of Nyssa', in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 18 (1973), pp. 59–78.

44 Cf. Marguerite Abineau, 'Introduction' to Grégoire de Nysse, *Traité de la Verginité*, cit., pp. 116–118.

45 Cf. *In Cant.* 10, 2, 30–31, p. 378.

46 Cf. Plot., *Enn.* I 6 (1) 7, 1–12. For Plotinus' later reflections on beauty, see Suzanne Stern-Gillet, 'Le principe du Beau chez Plotin: Réflexions sur *Enneas* VI.7.32 et 33', in *Phronesis* 45 (2000), pp. 38–63.

47 Cf. Greg. Nyss., *Apol. in Hex.* 31, 46, 6–9.

48 Cf. A. Vasiliu, 'Del divino nelle tecniche. Descrivere in stile omerico alla fine dell'antichità', in S. Marino and A. Stavru (eds), *Ekphrasis*, monographic issue of the journal *Estetica. Studi e ricerche* 1 (2013), pp. 256–261.

49 Cf. Plot. *Enn.* I 6 (1) 2, 14–18; ibid. I 6 (1) 5, 48–49.

50 For Gregory's view on matter, see my *Filosofia emendata*, cit., pp. 43–51.

51 Cf. *De virg.* 18, 1, 9–13, p. 464.

52 This is for Gregory a temporary condition, according to the concept of *apokatastasis*, cf. for example *De hom. op*. 21, 1–3, pp. 230, 12–232, 25.

53 See for example *Enn*. I 6 (1) 2, 13–18 and *Enn*. III 5 (50) 1, 63. Cf. K. Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus: A Practical Introduction to Neoplatonism* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2005), pp. 222–225; and L.P. Gerson, *Plotinus* (London-New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 185.

54 Cf. *De hom. op.* 5, 1, p. 128, 10–29 and *In Cant.* I, 28, 7–29, 1.

55 Cf. *In Cant.* XIV, pp. 407, 15–408, 2.

56 It seems that the church was built in Nyssa: see M. Cassia, *Cappadocia romana*, cit., pp. 208–210

57 In *De Virg*. 11, 2, 10–15 he merely defines those who indulge the sensual pleasures as worse than those who marvel at the products of human ingenuity, although even these do not understand the real beauty, the invisible one.

Chapter 3

1 Cf. D.J. O'Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 89.
2 Cf., on the other hand, J. Rist's reservations on this view in *Plotinus and Christian Philosophy*, cit., pp. 386–413.
3 Plotinus started writing his treatise in the first year of Gallienus' reign, when he was about forty-nine years old: cf. Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 4, 9–14.
4 For Plotinus' influence on aesthetics, cf. A. Schmit, 'Symmetrie und Schönheit. Plotins Kritik an hellenistischen Proportionslehren und ihre unterschiedlich Wirkungsgeschichte in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit', in Verena Olejniczak Lobsien and Claudia Olk (eds), *Neuplatonismus und Ästhetik. Zur Transformationsgeschichte des Schönen* (Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 2007), pp. 59–84; cf., T. Leinkauf, 'Der Neuplatonische Begriff des "Schönen" im Kontext von Kunst- und Dichtungstheorie der Renaissance', ibid. pp. 85–115.
5 *Enn.* I 6 (1) 9, 6–15.
6 Respectively 252d 7 and 254b 7.
7 Anne-Lise Darras-Worms, comment to *Plotin. Traité 1* (Paris: Cerf, 2007), p. 229.
8 Cf. ibid., p. 230.
9 On the different kinds of love in Plotinus' view, see F. Romano, 'La passione amorosa in Plotino', in *Discorsi* 4/2 (1984), pp. 7–21, now in *idem*, *L'Uno come fondamento. La crisi dell'ontologia classica. Raccolta di scritti rari e inediti*, ed. by G.R. Giardina (Catania: CUECM, 2004), pp. 271–286.
10 Cf. Ch. Guidelli, *Dall'ordine alla vita. Mutamenti del bello nel Platonismo antico* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1999), p. 127.
11 Here Plotinus clearly does not consider clay modelling, which differs considerably from stone sculpting.
12 S.R.L. Clark, 'Going Naked into the Shrine: Herbert, Plotinus and Constructive Metaphor,' in D. Hedley and S. Hutton (eds), *Platonism at the Origins of Modernity: Studies on Platonism and Early Modern Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), pp. 45–61) tried to demonstrate the specific feature of the metaphor of nudity. In the same way it can be said that there is a structural necessity in the sculpting metaphor.
13 I think that, in order to comprehend the metaphor in each of its elements, the meaning of σκοτεινὰ, here opposite to λαμπρὰ, is not *dark*, but indeed *matte*, lacking of brightness or not shining. Obviously, with reference to the soul, this distinction is not influential.

14 The exhortation to sculpt one's own statue can be found also in Porphyry, *De abst.* 2, 49, 3; cf. D. Susanetti (ed.), *Plotino. Sul bello (Enneade I 6)* (Padova: Imprimitur, 1995), p. 159s., n. 176.

15 *In Cant.* XIV, pp. 407, 17–408, 5 ed. Langerbeck (transl. by R.A. Norris).

16 See *De opificio hominis*, *PG* 44, 253, 30–56.

17 See ibid., 137, 5–10. The parenetic metaphor of painting seems to have a different legacy from that of sculpture: it is present in various authors, from Basil of Ancyra to Ps. Macarius, Ephrem, John Chrysostom, Teodoret of Cirrhus, until Romanos the Melodist; see G. Frank, 'The Image in Tandem. Painting Metaphors and Moral Discourse in Late Antique Christianity', in R. Valantasis *et al.*, *The Subjective Eye: Essays in Culture, Religion and Gender in Honour of M.R. Miles* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006), pp. 33–47.

18 *In Cant.* I 28, 7–29, 1, ed. Langerbeck.

19 *De Vita Moysis* 313; see M. Corbin, *La vie de Moïse selon Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Cerf, 2008), pp. 370–371.

20 For a full discussion of the use of perspective in antiquity, cf. R. Sinisgalli, *Perspective in the Visual Culture of Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

21 J. Pépin, 'Ut scriptura pictura. Un thème de l'esthétique médiévale et ses origines', in F.X. Martin and J.A. Richmond (eds), *From Augustine to Eriugena: Essays on Neoplatonism and Christianity in Honour of John O'Meara*, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), pp. 168–182.

22 Horace, *Ars poet*. 361–365.

23 See J. Pigeaud, 'Note sull'*ekphrasis* in Filostrato, Luciano e Callistrato', in S. Marino and A. Stavru (eds), *Ekphrasis*, cit., p. 130; and G. Lombardo, *L'estetica antica* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2002), pp. 168–172.

24 Cf. Greg. Magn., *Ep.* IX 105; XI 13.

25 Cf. *ibid.*, IX 52.

26 Paulin. Nol., *Carm.* XXVII 542–551.

27 Cfr. Porph., *De imag.* fr. 351, ed. Smith, 408 (= Eus., *Praep. Ev.* III 7, 1): "Φθέγξομαι οἷς θέμις ἐστί, θύρας δ' ἐπίθεσθε, βέβηλοι" σοφίας θεολόγου νοήματα δεικνύς, οἷς τὸν θεὸν καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ τὰς δυνάμεις διὰ εἰκόνων συμφύλων αἰσθήσει ἐμήνυσαν ἄνδρες τὰ ἀφανῆ φανεροῖς ἀποτυπώσαντες πλάσμασι, τοῖς καθάπερ ἐκ βίβλων τῶν ἀγαλμάτων ἀναλέγειν τὰ περὶ θεῶν μεμαθηκόσι γράμματα. Θαυμαστὸν δὲ οὐδὲν ξύλα καὶ λίθους ἡγεῖσθαι τὰ ξόανα τοὺς ἀμαθεστάτους, καθὰ δὴ καὶ τῶν γραμμάτων οἱ ἀνόητοι λίθους μὲν ὁρῶσι τὰς στήλας, ξίλα δὲ τὰς δέλτους, ἐξυφασμένην δὲ πάπυρον τὰς βίβλους.

28 Cf. J. Pépin, 'Ut Scriptura Pictura', cit., pp. 178–182.

29 Cf. Greg. Naz., *Carm.* 2, 1, 12, 739–743, ed. Meier, 68, and *Carm.* 2, 1, 17, 1–4, PG 37, 1262; see C. Crimi, Luci e colori di Gregorio Nazianzeno, in C. Burini de Lorenzi and M. De Gaetano (eds), *Poesia tardoantica e medievale*, atti del IV Convegno internazionale di studi di Perugia, 15–17 novembre 2007 (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2010), pp. 145–158; and also C. Crimi, 'I colori nelle poesie di Gregorio Nazianzeno,' in *Motivi e forme della poesia cristiana antica tra scrittura e tradizione classica, XXXVI Incontro di studiosi dell'antichità cristiana (3–5 maggio 2006)* (Roma: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2008), pp. 349–357.

30 Bas. Caes., *In Quadraginta Martyres Sebastenses II*, PG 31, 508D–509a (transl. by P. Allen).

31 A study on the importance of the role of the cult of the martyrs in Cappadocia in V.M. Limberis, *Architects of Piety: The Cappadocian Fathers and the Cult of the Martyrs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

32 On this work see A. Quacquarelli, 'L'antropologia del martire nel panegirico del Nisseno a San Teodoro di Amasea', in U. Bianchi (ed.), *Arché e Telos. L'antropologia di Origene e Gregorio di Nissa. Analisi storico-religiosa. Atti del colloquio di Milano, 17–19 maggio 1979* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1981), pp. 217–228.

33 The shrine was in Euchaita, and the relics were later taken to Venice; on the cult of the saint, see C. Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 45.

34 Cfr. Greg. Nyss., *Ep. 25 ad Amphil.*, 79, 9–83, 14 ed. Pasquali (*ed. altera*, *Greg. Nyss. Opera* VIII/2, Leiden 1959). Cf. P. Maraval (ed.), *Grégoire de Nysse. Lettres* (Paris: Cerf, 1990), p. 290 n. 1; G. Mathew, 'The Aesthetic Theories of Gregory of Nyssa,' in G. Robertson and G. Henderson (eds), *Studies in Memory of David Talbot Rice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1975), pp. 217–222.

35 For a study on the presence of crafts in Gregory, cf. H.R. Drobner, *Archeologia Patristica. Die Schriften der Kirchenväter als Quellen der Archäologie und Kulturgeschichte: Gregor von Nyssa*, Homiliae in Ecclesiasten (Roma: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Patristica, 1996), pp. 93–104.

36 Greg. Nyss. *Opera*, *Sermones*, Pars II, Vol X, 62, 25–64, 2 (transl. by J. Leemans).

37 A. Alexandrakis, in 'Does Modern Art Reflect Plotinus' Notion of Beauty?,' in R.B. Harris, *Neoplatonism and Contemporary Thought*, part II (Albany: State University of New York, 2002), pp. 231–242, for example, has tried to connect Plotinus' view on beauty to twentieth-century artistic practice.

38 Cf. Greg. Nyss., *In Quadr. Mart. I*: Ἆρ᾽ οὐ λαλιαί τινές εἰσι, καθώς φησιν ὁ Προφήτης, καὶ λόγοι, ὧν οὐχὶ μόνον ἀκούονται αἱ φωναὶ, αὐτῶν παντὸς λόγου εὐτονώτερον διηγούμεναι τὰ θαύματα.

39 For a more general reflection of the role of silence in Nyssa and its relationship with the Neoplatonic philosophy see Ilaria Ramelli, 'Silenzio apofatico in Gregorio di Nissa: un confronto con Plotino e un'indagine delle ascendenze origeniane', in *Silenzio e Parola nella Patristica*. Atti del XXXIX Incontro di Studiosi dell'Antichità Cristiana. Roma, 6–8 maggio 2010 (Roma: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2012), pp. 367–388.

40 Cfr. J. Pépin, 'Ut Scriptura Pictura', cit., p. 169s.

41 Ioann. Dam., *De im.*, scol. I 47, 2, 4, vol. III, 151 (ed. Kotter): [. . .] βίβλοι τοῖς ἀγραμμάτοις εἰσὶν αἱ εἰκόνες καὶ τῆς τῶν ἁγίων τιμῆς ἀσίγητοι κήρυκες ἐν ἀήχῳ φωνῇ τοὺς ὁρῶντας διδάσκουσαι καὶ τὴν ὅρασιν ἁγιάξουσαι.

42 Michelangelo, sonnet 151, 1–4: *Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto/ch'un marmo solo in sé non circoscriva/col suo soverchio; e solo a quello arriva/la man che ubbidisce all'intelletto*. The sonnet continues: *Il mal ch'io fuggo, e'l ben ch'io mi prometto,/in te, donna leggiadra, altera e diva,/tal si nasconde; e perch'io più non viva,/contraria ho l'arte al disïato effetto./Amore dunque non ha, né tua beltate/o durezza o fortuna o gran disdegno/del mio mal colpa, o mio destino o sorte;/se dentro del tuo cuor morte e pietate/porti in un tempo, e che'l mio basso ingegno/non sappia, ardendo, trarne altro che morte*. ([. . .] The pain I flee from and the joy I hope for/are similarly hidden in you, lovely lady,/lofty and divine; but, to my mortal harm,/my art gives results the reverse of what I wish./Love, therefore, cannot be blamed for my pain,/nor can your beauty, your hardness, or your scorn,/nor fortune, nor my destiny, nor chance,/if you hold both death and mercy in your heart/at the same time, and my lowly wits, though burning,/cannot draw from it anything but death [tr. Saslow]). A similar image is in sonnet 152.

43 Cf. E. Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, Engl. trans by J.J.S. Peake (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 115–121.

44 Cf. C.L. Frommel, *Michelangelo und Tommaso dei Cavalieri. Mit der übertragung von Francesco Diaccetos 'Panegirico all'amore'* (Amsterdam: Castrum peregrini, 1979). An English translation of Diacceto's *Panegyric*, by L. Deitz, in J. Kraye (ed.), *Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts. Volume I: Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 156–165.

45 Cf. Panofsky, *Idea*, cit., pp. 88–92.

46 For an analysis of Varchi's oration in the framework of contemporary artistic literature, see D. Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Arts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 203–233.

47 Cf. *ibid.* p. 204.

48 This is what can be observed, for example, in G.C. Argan, *Michelangelo artista e poeta* (Firenze: Giunti, 1987), p. 47; and J.M. Saslow (ed.), *The Poetry of Michelangelo* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 34f. and 302f.

49 Cf. R.J. Clements, *Michelangelo's Theory of Art* (New York: New York University Press, 1961), pp. 22f.

50 Cf. E.N. Girardi, *Studi su Michelangiolo scrittore* (Firenze: Olschki, 1974), p. 64f. and n. 10.

51 Cf. H.D. Saffrey, 'Florence, 1492: The Reappearance of Plotinus', in *Renaissance Quarterly* 49 (1996), pp. 488–508, repr. in id., *Le Néoplatonisme après Plotin* (Paris: Vrin, 2000), pp. 277–293.

52 Ficino's Latin translation of the passage of *Enn.* I 6 9 is: *Quoniam igitur pacto, quale sit animi boni decus, inspicies? Age, te revoca in te ipsum, atque contemplare; ac si nondum te cognosces pulchrum, statuarium imitabere. Hic enim, ubi statuam optat pulchram, partim quidem abscindit, partim quoque dirigit et expoliturus abradit, partim levigat et abstergit, donec faciem in statuam exprimat speciosam. Ita et tu tolle supervacua, obliqua dirige, obscura purgando collustra, neque desinas circa statuam tuam elaborare, quousque divinis virtutis fulgor tibi subrutilet, quoad temperantiam cernas firmiter in maiestate pura sanctaque sedentem*.

Chapter 4

1 Cf. R. Bianchi Bandinelli, *Rome: The Late Empire: Roman Art, AD 200–400* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), pp. 16–18. Cf. also A. Grabar, 'Plotin et les origines de l'ésthetique médiévale', in *Cahiers Archéologiques* I (1945), pp. 15–34, repr. in idem, *L'art de la fin de l'antiquité et du moyen âge*, v. I, (Paris: Collège de France, 1968), pp. 15–29.

2 Plot., *Enn.* I 6 (1) 1, 21–34.

3 Cf. the considerations about classical idealization and contemporary art in E.C. Mansfield, *Too Beautiful to Picture: Zeuxis, Myth and Mimesis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

4 Pindar, *Olympic* I, 1–7 Ἄριστον μὲν ὕδωρ, ὁ δὲ χρυσὸς αἰθόμενον πῦρ
ἅτε διαπρέπει νυκτὶ μεγάνορος ἔξοχα πλούτου:
εἰ δ᾽ ἄεθλα γαρύεν
ἔλδεαι, φίλον ἦτορ,
μηκέθ᾽ ἁλίου σκόπει

ἄλλο θαλπνότερον ἐν ἀμέρᾳ φαεννὸν ἄστρον ἐρήμας δι᾽ αἰθέρος,
μηδ᾽ Ὀλυμπίας ἀγῶνα φέρτερον αὐδάσομεν.

5 Cf. Plato, *Hippias Major* 289e–290d.

6 [. . .] ἐπὶ τῶν σωμάτων φωτὸς ἐμμεμιγμένου ὅμως δεῖ φωτὸς ἄλλου, ἵνα καὶ φανείη τὸ ἐν αὐτοῖς χρῶμα τὸ φῶς.

7 On the imitation of nature, see S. Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of* Mimesis*: Ancient texts and modern problems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

8 Cf. R.L. Cardullo, 'L'analogia *techne-phusis* e il finalismo universale in *Phys.* II', in ead. and G.R. Giardina (eds), *La fisica di Aristotele oggi. Problemi e prospettive*, (Catania: CUECM, 2005), pp. 57–59.

9 See my 'Idomeneo e Paride di fronte ad Elena. Un esempio di libertà morale in *Enn*. III 3 [48] 5, 41–43', in M. Di Pasquale Barbanti and D. Iozzia (eds), *L'anima in Plotino. Atti del convegno di Catania, 29–30 gennaio 2009* (Catania: CUECM, 2009), pp. 137–157.

10 Plot., *Enn*. V 8 (31) 2, 6–15.

11 Cf. G. Lombardo, *L'estetica antica*, cit., pp. 29–32.

12 Gal., *De plac. Hipp. Plat*, V, p. 449 Kühn; *Temp.*, I, p. 566 Kühn (= Polykleitos, A 3 DK).

13 Plut., *Mor.*, 86 A e 636 C (= Policleto, ? 1 DK); Phil., *Mech.*, IV, 2 (= Polykleitos, B 2 D-K). Cf. J. Pigeaud, *Note sull'ekphrasis in Filostrato, Luciano e Callistrato*, cit., p. 141–143; S. Settis, 'Policleto fra sophia e mousike', in *Rivista di Filologia ed Istruzione classica* CI (1973), pp. 303–317.

14 Cf. *Phil.* 64e: μετριότης γὰρ καὶ συμμετρία κάλλος δήπου καὶ ἀρετὴ πανταχοῦ συμβαίνει γίγνεσθαι.

15 Cf. *Tim.* 87c: πᾶν δὴ τὸ ἀγαθὸν καλόν, τὸ δὲ καλὸν οὐκ ἄμετρον: καὶ ζῷον οὖν τὸ τοιοῦτον ἐσόμενον σύμμετρον θετέον. Cf. G. Hon and B.R. Goldstein, *From Summetria to Symmetry: The Making of a Revolutionary Scientific Concept* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), pp. 93–95.

16 Plot., *Enn*. I 6 (1) 2, 13–25.

17 *Enn.* I 6 (1) 2, 25–27.

18 Cf. J.-M. Narbonne, *Introduction* to *Plotin. Traité 1*, cit., p. CCCVIII.

19 Διὰ τί γὰρ ἐπὶ μὲν ζῶντος προσώπου μᾶλλον τὸ φέγγος τοῦ καλοῦ, ἴχνος δ΄ ἐπὶ τεθνηκότος καὶ μήπω τοῦ προσώπου ταῖς σαρξὶ καὶ ταῖς συμμετρίαις μεμαρασμένου; Καὶ τῶν ἀγαλμάτων δὲ τὰ ζωτικώτερα καλλίω, κἂν συμμετρότερα τὰ ἕτερα ᾖ;

20 Cf. W. Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, v. I (The Hague-Paris: Mouton, 1970), p. 324.

21 Cf. for example Porph., *Peri Agalmaton*, fr. 357a, 358, 359.

22 In *de Abstinentia* 2, 18, however, Porphyry states that Aeschylus preferred the Daidalic style to the more elaborate classical style, as more apt to depict the divine.

23 = Euseb., *Praep. ev*., III 7, 2–4: Φωτοειδοῦς δὲ ὄντος τοῦ θείου καὶ ἐν πυρὸς αἰθερίου περιχύσει διάγοντος ἀφανοῦς τε τυγχάνοντος αἰσθήσει περὶ θνητὸν βίον ἀσχόλῳ, διὰ μὲν τῆς διαυγοῦς ὕλης, οἷον κρυστάλλου ἢ Παρίου λίθου ἢ καὶ ἐλέφαντος, εἰς τὴν τοῦ φωτὸς αὐτοῦ ἔννοιαν ἐνῆγον, διὰ δὲ τῆς τοῦ χρυσοῦ εἰς τὴν τοῦ πυρὸς δια νόησιν καὶ τὸ ἀμίαντον αὐτοῦ, ὅτι χρυσὸς οὐ μιαίνεται. πολλοὶ δὲ αὖ καὶ μέλανι λίθῳ τὸ ἀφανὲς αὐτοῦ τῆς οὐσίας ἐδήλωσαν.

24 J.-M. Narbonne, *Introduction*, cit., p. CCCIX.

25 Plato, *Phaed.* 100 c–d: σκόπει δή, ἔφη, τὰ ἐξῆς ἐκείνοις ἐάν σοι συνδοκῇ ὥσπερ ἐμοί. φαίνεται γάρ μοι, εἴ τί ἐστιν ἄλλο καλὸν πλὴν αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν, οὐδὲ δι᾽ ἓν ἄλλο καλὸν εἶναι ἢ διότι μετέχει ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ: καὶ πάντα δὴ οὕτως λέγω. τῇ τοιᾷδε αἰτίᾳ συγχωρεῖς;/συγχωρῶ, ἔφη./οὐ τοίνυν, ἦ δ᾽ ὅς, ἔτι μανθάνω οὐδὲ δύναμαι τὰς ἄλλας αἰτίας τὰς σοφὰς ταύτας γιγνώσκειν: ἀλλ᾽ ἐάν τίς μοι λέγῃδι᾽ ὅτι καλόν ἐστιν ὁτιοῦν, ἢ χρῶμα εὐανθὲς ἔχον ἢ σχῆμα ἢ ἄλλο ὁτιοῦν τῶν τοιούτων, τὰ μὲν ἄλλα χαίρειν ἐῶ, – ταράττομαι γὰρ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις πᾶσι – τοῦτο δὲ ἁπλῶς καὶ ἀτέχνως καὶ ἴσως εὐήθως ἔχω παρ᾽ ἐμαυτῷ [. . .].

26 Cf. J.P. Anton, 'Plotinus' Refutation of Beauty as Symmetry', in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 23, 2 (1964), pp. 233–237.

27 Cf. G. Lombardo, *L'estetica antica*, cit., p. 197.

28 Cf. O. Kuisma, *Art or experience*, cit., p. 187.

29 Cf. D. Janes, *God and Gold in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 139–140.

30 Cf. S.J. Fleming, *Roman Glass: Reflections on Cultural Change* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 1999), p. 92f.

31 Cf. J. Henderson, *The Science and Archaeology of Materials: An Investigation of Inorganic Materials* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 61–64.

32 Cf. Narbonne, *Introduction*, cit., p. CCCVII.

33 Basil, *Hom. in Hexaëmeron* II 7, 6–7 (transl. by B. Jackson).

34 J. Rist, 'Basil's "Neoplatonism". Its Background and Nature', cit., pp. 206–207.

35 P. Henry, *Les États du texte de Plotin* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1938), p. 172f.

36 Q. Cataudella, 'L'estetica cristiana', in *Momenti e problemi di storia dell'estetica* (Milano: Marzorati, 1959), pp. 81–114.

37 Basil, *Hom. in Hexaëmeron* III 10, 1–3.

38 Cf. *Enn.* V 5 (32) 12, 18; I 8 (51) 2, 7. But see also I 6 (1) 6, 26.

39 Cf. A. Meredith, 'The Good and the Beautiful in Gregory of Nyssa', cit., pp. 133–145.

40 Gregory of Nyssa, *De opificio hominis*, *PG* 44, 161, 29–42 (transl. by A.H. Wilson).
41 Cf. M. Di Pasquale Barbanti, *La metafora in Plotino*, cit., pp. 173–179. The metaphor of the mirror can be either positive or negative: cf. *Enn.* I 1, 8; I 4, 10; I 6, 8; III 6, 7; III 6, 9; III 6, 13; III 6, 14; IV 3, 11; IV 3, 12; IV 3, 30; IV 5, 7; VI 2, 22; VI 4, 10. For the metaphor of the mirror in the wider context of classical literature, cf. N. Hugedé, *La métaphore du miroir* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1957).
42 Plot. *Enn.* III 2 [48] 3, 9–41 and 13, 18–25.
43 Greg. Nyss., *Apol. in Hex.* 31, p. 44, 13–16 ed. Drobner (transl. by A.H. Wilson).
44 Cf. *Enn.* V 8 (31) 2, 6–15.
45 *De opificio hominis*, *PG* 44, 201, 11–204, 3 (transl. by A.H. Wilson).
46 For Gregory's position, cf. Ilaria Ramelli, 'The Debate on *Apokatastasis* in Pagan and Christian Platonists: Martianus, Macrobius, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine', in *Illinois Classical Studies* 33–34 (2008–2009), pp. 201–234.
47 Cf. W. Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, cit., p. 323s.
48 In this fragment from a mosaic floor, the personification of Ktisis does not relate in scale to the smaller figure of donor on her right (another symmetrical figure was probably on her left); for details about the mosaic, see H.C. Evans, *The Arts of Byzantium*, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 58, 4 (2001), p. 16.
49 Cf J. Laurent, *Notice* a Plotin, *Traité 1 (1, 6), Sur le beau*, in Plotin, *Traités 1–6*, eds L. Brisson and J.F. Pradeau (Paris: Flammarion, 2002), p. 59.
50 But see M. Di Pasquale Barbanti, *Origene di Alessadria tra Platonismo e Sacra Scrittura. Teologia e antropologia del* De principiis (Catania: CUECM, 2003), pp. 27–58, about the historiographic issue of Origen's presence in Ammonius Saccas' school.

Chapter 5

1 Plot., *Enn.* I 6 (1) 4, 15–17.
2 Cf. F. Romano, *La passione amorosa in Plotino*, cit., pp. 271–286.
3 Ibid. p. 275.
4 Cf. C. Eichenlaub, 'Aristotelian *Katharsis* as Ethical Conversion in Plotinian Aesthetics', in *Dionysius* 17 (1999), p. 68.
5 Cf. Plato, *Phil.* 46a.
6 Cf. G. Cerri, 'L'apporto teorico del Filebo alla dottrina poetica dell' *eleos* e del *phobos*', in P. Cosenza (ed.), *Il* Filebo *di Platone e la sua tradizione. Atti del Convegno di Napoli, 4–6 Novembre 1993* (Napoli: d'Auria, 1996), pp. 29–51.
7 Cf. S. Stern-Gillet, 'Le Principe du Beau chez Plotin', cit., pp. 38–63.

8 Cfr. J. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, cit., p. 59.
9 Cf. Plot., *Enn.* I 6 (1) 6, 21 e 24; VI 7 (38) 33, 22; VI 2 (43) 18, 1.
10 *Enn*. VI 7 (38) 32, 31.
11 Cfr. Plato, *Symp.* 201a; 204c; but see also 206e.
12 *Enn.* I 6 (1) 4, 19.
13 Cf. F. Romano, *La passione amorosa in Plotino*, cit., pp. 277–278.
14 Cfr. J. Rist, *Eros and Psyche* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1964), pp. 110–112.
15 Cfr. J. Lacrosse, *L'amour chez Plotin: érôs hénologique, érôs noétique, érôs psychique* (Bruxelles: Ousia, 1994), pp. 12–13.
16 Cf. A.H. Armstrong, 'Platonic Eros and Christian Agape', in *Downside Review* 3 (1961), pp. 105–121; repr. in idem, *Plotinian and Christian Studies* (London: Variorum Reprint, 1979), IX.
17 Cf. J. Rist, *Eros and Psyche*, cit., p. 128.
18 Plot., *Enn.* 1 6 (1) 7, 13 f.
19 *Il.* 4, 79 e *Od.* 3, 372.
20 Plato, *Phaedr.* 254c 4: ὁ μὲν [i.e. one of the two horses] ὑπ' αἰσχύνης τε καὶ θάμβους ἱδρῶτι πᾶσαν ἔβρεξε τὴν ψυχήν. Cfr. *Ion* 535e 3: συνθαμβοῦντας.
21 About the emotions of love in the *Phaidrus*, cf. L. Palumbo, *Eros Phobos Epithymia. Sulla natura dell'emozione in alcuni dialoghi di Platone* (Napoli: Loffredo, 2001), pp. 44–59. For the concept of πάθος in Plato, cf. B. Centrone, 'ΠΑΘΟΣ e ΟΥΣΙΑ nei primi dialoghi di Platone', in *Elenchos* 16 (1995), pp. 131–134.
22 Pindar, *Nem.* 1, 55 f.: θάμβει δυσφόρῳ/ τερπνῷ τε.
23 Cfr. *Eccl.* 12, 5: θάμβοι (rare masculine plural form). See also *Cant*. III 8.
24 *Enn*. V 5 (32) 12, 9 f.: Καὶ τοῦ μὲν καλοῦ ἤδη οἷον εἰδόσι καὶ ἐγρηγορόσιν ἡ ἀντίληψις καὶ τὸ θάμβος, καὶ τοῦ ἔρωτος ἡ ἔγερσις. Cfr. also *ibid.* 12, 34 sg.
25 Plato*, Phil*. 47a 8; *Critias* 115d 2.
26 Cf. Aesch., *Pers.* 606.
27 Aristoph., *Plut*. 673.
28 Eurip., *Hipp. 38*; *Med.* 8.
29 Plot., *Enn*. I 3 (20) 2, 1 f.
30 Plot., *Enn.* III 6 (26) 4, 17 f.: Τί ποτε ποιεῖ τοῦτο τὸ φοβεῖσθαι; Ταραχὴν καὶ ἔκπληξίν, φασιν, ἐπὶ προσδοκωμένῳ κακῷ. V 8 (31) 11, 25–28: νόσος γὰρ μᾶλλον ἔκπληξιν, ὑγίεια δὲ ἠρέμα συνοῦσα μᾶλλον ἂν σύνεσιν δοίη αὑτῆς.
31 The noun is later used by Proclus, see W. Beierwaltes, *Proklos: Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik* (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1965) p. 309.
32 As in Plato, *Crat.* 420a. Cfr. *Il*. 17.439; *Od*. 14.144.
33 Archil., fr. 196 ed. West.

34 Sappho, fr. 22, 11; 48, 2; 94, 23; 102, 2 ed. Voigt.

35 In the Capitoline Museum in Rome.

36 Plato, *Phaedr.* 250c 7, 252a 7, 253e 6; *Phil.* 47e1, 50b 7; *Symp.* 197d 7 f.; *Crat.* 420a 4 e 6 *et al.*; a number of times the verb ποθέω is also used.

37 Plato, *Symp.* 206d 8; cf. also *Prot*. 310d 3 and *Crat.* 404a 4.

38 For example it is also used in the First Letter of Peter 3, 6.

39 Sapph. fr. 31, 6; see also *ead.* 22, 14 and, *e.g.*, Alc. fr. 283, 3 Voigt; Aesch. *Prom.* 856; Eur. *Cycl.* 183 f.; Callim. *H. Dian.* 191; Apoll. Rhod. I 1232.

40 See the use of the corresponding verb in *Enn*. I 3 (20) 2, 5 (the ἐρωτικός is the subject) and *Enn*. I 6 (1) 3, 35.

41 See also *Enn*. V 5 (32) 12, 34 f.

42 For the 'feminine' sensibility of Plotinus' mysticism, and its influence on Christianity, see P. Hadot, *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard*, cit., pp 72–74.

43 D.J. O'Meara ('Le Commentaire de Marsile Ficin sur le traité *Du Beau* de Plotin. Notes et traduction de l'argumentum' [with S. Maspoli Genetelli], in *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 49 (2002), p. 5), however, considers Ficino's words on the power of the emotions of love as not related to Plotinus but to Plato or to other treatises of the *Enneads*, such as VI 7 (38) 21 and 22. From what we have seen, it seems nevertheless that powerful erotic emotions are present in this treatise as well.

44 Cf. F. Romano, *La passione amorosa in Plotino*, cit., p. 281.

45 Cant. III 7–8: ἰδοὺ ἡ κλίνη τοῦ Σαλωμών, ἑξήκοντα δυνατοὶ κύκλῳ αὐτῆς ἀπὸ δυνατῶν Ἰσραήλ, πάντες κατέχοντες ρομφαίαν, δεδιδαγμένοι πόλεμον, ἀνὴρ ρομφαία αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ μηρὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ θάμβους ἐν νυξί.

46 Gregory champions the superiority of the spiritual exegesis even against his brother Basil: cf. *e.g. Apol. In Hex.* 28, 42 about the interpretation of the waters above the skies in *Gen.* 1, 6–7; see my *Filosofia emendata*, cit., pp. 83–95.

47 *In Cant.* 6, 191, 6–192, 4th ed. Langerbeck (transl. by R.A. Norris).

48 Kant theorizes the difference between the beautiful and the sublime in relation to natural objects, for example, in *Critique of Judgement* 5:244: 'The beautiful in nature concerns the form of the object, which consists in limitation; the sublime, by contrast, is to be found in a formless object insofar as limitlessness is represented in it, or at its instance, and yet it is also thought as a totality [. . .] Hence it is also incompatible with charms, and, since the mind is not merely attracted by the object, but is also always reciprocally repelled by it, the satisfaction in the sublime does not so much contain a positive pleasure as it does admiration or respect, i.e., it deserves to be called negative pleasure' (transl. by P. Guyer and E. Matthews). Interestingly, Kant's conception can also be seen as paradoxical, as

pointed out by H.E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste. A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 310: 'If the paradox underlying Kant's account of the beautiful is that of a purposiveness without purpose, underlying the sublime is the seemingly more paradoxical conception of a counterpurposive purposiveness.'

49 Cfr., *e.g.*, Ex. 34, 10; Deut. 10, 17; Ps. 96, 4.

50 Cf. *Luc.* 1, 9; 1, 65; 2, 9.

51 Cf., *e.g.*, Marc. 4, 41; Matth. 9, 8; *Lc.* 8, 37.

52 Cf. Marc. 9, 6; Luc. 9, 34.

53 Cf. Marc. 16, 8. See H. Balz, Φοβέω κτλ, in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1949–1979) vol. XV, coll. 101–110.

54 Cfr., *e.g.*, Luc. 1, 50; 18, 4; 23, 40; 2 Cor. 5, 11.

55 1 Cor. 2, 3; 2 Cor. 7, 15; Phil. 2, 12.

56 Cf. Arist. *Poet*. 14.2, 1453b 12.

57 Cfr. Plato, *Phil.* 48a.

58 Cf. Arist. *Poet.* 6.2, 1449b 27. On the issue of tragic pleasure see P. Destrée, *Aristotle on the Paradox of Tragic Pleasure*, in J. Levinson (ed.), *Suffering Art Gladly: The Paradox of Negative Emotion in Art* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 3–27.

59 Cf. *Contra Eun.* 37, 20; 41, 6; 162, 11; 220, 4; 306, 9.

60 Cf. Ps. Longinus, 9, 6–10.

61 The quotation is a combination of *Il.* 21, 388 and 20, 61–65.

62 Theagenes of Rhegium already in the sixth century had interpreted Homer allegorically, identifying the divinities with the cosmic elements: cf. fr. 2 A DK. An overview of allegory in classical antiquity and Stoicism, cf. R. Radice, 'Introduzione' to Ilaria Ramelli, *Allegoristi dell'età classica. Opere e frammenti* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2007), IX–XLVIII.

63 Another combination of *Il.* 13, 18–19; 20, 60; 13, 27–29.

64 Ps. Longinus, 9, 10: πολὺ δὲ τῶν περὶ τὴν θεομαχίαν ἀμείνω.

65 For Proclus' general literary theory, see A. Sheppard, 'Vedere un mondo in un granello di sabbia: Teoria letteraria ed estetica in Proclo', in D. Iozzia (ed.), *Philosophy and Art*, cit. pp. 69–90.

66 On Proclus' allegorical interpretation, see A. Sheppard, *The Poetics of Phantasia*, cit., pp. 89–99 and *Studies on the 5th and 6th essays of Proclus' Commentary on the Republic* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980); also R.L. Cardullo, *Il linguaggio del simbolo in Proclo. Analisi filosofico-semantica dei termini symbolon / eikôn / synthema nel* Commentario alla Repubblica (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1985).

67 Cfr. Proclus, *Comm. in R.* I 85, 16–86, 5 ed. Kroll; see R.L. Cardullo, *Il linguaggio del simbolo in Proclo*, cit., pp. 132–134 and p. 212, where the dissimilarity of the Homeric poems from the divine reality is due to the fact that 'lo spirituale non può riflettersi nella materia se non subendo le degradazioni più profonde', a view opposed to that of J. Pépin ('Aspects théoriques du symbolisme dans la tradition dionysienne. Antécédents et nouveautés', in *Simboli e simbologia nell'Alto Medioevo*, atti della XIII Settimana di Spoleto, 3–9 Aprile 1975 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo 1976), pp. 33–66, who sees instead an 'antipathie de Proclus à l'endroit du symbolisme dissemblable' (p. 61). It seems in any case that Proclus favours in a number of passages (cf. *in R.* I 76. 17–79. 18; 84. 22–30; 198. 18–19) the myths which present characteristics opposite to divine nature, beacuse they awaken the soul through symbolism.

68 Cf. also J. Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1982), p. 49.

69 Cf. Ps. Dionysius, *De Cael. Hier.* 2. For the reprise of the theme in the Latin-speaking Middle Ages cf. C. Martello, '*Pulchrum* and *Pulchritudo* in John Eriugena', in D. Iozzia (ed.), *Philosophy and Art in Late Antiquity*, cit., pp. 149–161; J. Pépin, *Aspects théoriques de symbolisme*, cit., pp. 48–62.

70 On the relationship between the treatise *On the Sublime* and Kant, see G. Lombardo, *L'estetica antica*, cit., p. 182 and n. 16.

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Acknowledgements

In this book I have, in parts, included a revised and updated version of material that I have previously published in Italian. In particular, I have adapted excerpts from the following publications: 'Come mai l'oro è bello? Plotino, *Enn*. I 6 (1), 34 e i Cappadoci', in Daniele Iozzia (ed.) *Philosophy and art in Late Antiquity. Proceedings of the International Seminar of Catania, 8–9 November 2012*, Acireale: Bonanno, 2013, p. 129–149; *Filosofia emendata. Elementi connessi col Neoplatonismo nell'esegesi esamerale di Gregorio di Nissa*, Acireale-Roma: Bonanno 2006, pp. 192; 'Il carattere ossimorico delle emozioni d'amore in Plotino, *Enn*. I 6 (1) 4, 15–17', in G.R. Giardina (ed.), *Le emozioni secondo i filosofi antichi, atti del Convegno nazionale di Siracusa, 10-11 maggio 2007*, Catania: CUECM, 2008, pp. 163–175; 'Il paradosso della bellezza divina. Gregorio di Nissa, *In Cant.* VI, p. 191, 7–9 ed. Langerbeck,' in *Orpheus. Rivista di Umanità classica e cristiana* XXVIII (2007), pp. 100–115; 'ΓΡΑΦΗ ΣΙΩΠΩΣΑ: La giustificazione del ruolo della pittura nei Cappadoci', in *Silenzio e Parola nella Patristica. Atti del XXXIX Incontro di Studiosi dell'Antichità Cristiana. Roma, 6–8 maggio 2010*, Roma: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2012, pp. 675–683. An Italian draft of the first part of the third chapter is online as 'Ragioni e fortuna della metafora dello scolpire in Plotino, *Enn*. I 6 (1) 9, 6–15,' in *FirstDrafts@Classics@, Online Journal of the Center for Hellenic Studies*, Harvard University, 2010, pp. 1–12.

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